

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, January 12th, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 8.

NEW YORK, April 20, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG GRIZZLY ADAMS
THE WILD BEAST TAMER;
A TRUE STORY OF CIRCUS LIFE.
BY HAL STANDISH.



Young Grizzly Adams putting his trained lions through their tricks in the circus ring.

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A TRUE STORY OF CIRCUS LIFE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT AMERICAN CIRCUS IN AUSTRALIA—THE DARING FEAT OF A YOUNG HERO.

CRASH!

Clang!

Whir-r-r!

“Hurrah!”

A tremendous outburst of wild, barbaric music.

A wild shout from a thousand throats.

A combination of sounds absolutely inspiring!

What means this wild uproar, this tumult of bravos and crash of music, this vigorous blending of the vocal and instrumental?

We are in the circus.

Just outside the City of Sydney, New South Wales, in the island or continent, as you will, of Australia, the gleaming pavilions of Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum's Great American Circus are erected, and beneath them is gathered an admiring multitude.

Overhead, in the blue Australian skies, the sun shines with undiminished splendor, while below the spotless white of the monster tents appears in charming contrast to the bright green of the grass.

From the center pole of the main tent hang strips of flags of every nation, streamers and banners of quaint device and infinite variety.

Over all floats our beloved flag, God bless it! the grand and beautiful stars and stripes, telling the story of American enterprise, American thirst, and American talent.

Not one performer in the ring, not one attache, but is a true-blue, bona fide American; for this is the Great American Circus that has made the tour of the world.

It has captivated Europe, fascinated Asia, utterly subjected Africa, and turned Australia and the isles of the sea completely upside down.

Its performers have never been equalled, and cannot be excelled; its riders are the most intrepid and graceful, its tumblers the most astounding, its clowns the most grotesque and amusing, and its lion-tamer—

One must draw breath before describing him.

It is his appearance in the ring that produces the magnificent roar of applause, which, mingling with the music, fairly shakes the foundations of the Heavens.

There is one grand harmonious burst of weird music, and a boy, he can scarcely be called a young man, dashes into the ring in a chariot drawn by two milk-white steeds.

He is dressed in a most becoming and unique style, and looks for all the world like a young Hercules or Theseus just stepped out from a niche in some old Roman or Grecian temple.

His attire consisted of a complete suit of fleshings, which set off every muscle of his superb figure to advantage, bronze leather sandals, a leopard's skin draped across his chest and over his broad, well-moulded shoulders, a white ribbon about his head, confining his waving locks of rich brown hair, and in his hand a slender, gold-mounted, diamond-tipped whip.

This is Neil Adams, the boy lion-tamer, known to the profession as Young Grizzly Adams, the wild-beast tamer.

When in the center of the ring he springs from the chariot, which is borne away by the fleet-footed steeds, and suddenly utters a peculiar shout.

Those who have been in the wilds of Africa, among the Kaffirs, or perchance in the jungles of India, have doubtless heard this sound, which it is impossible to adequately describe in print, the nearest approximate equivalent being like the guttural:

“Ugh!”

The voice is thrown out with violence and with a rising inflection, and the sound thus made can be heard at some distance, and appears rather to be the cry of a beast than as if uttered by the human throat.

At this ejaculation, which is, perhaps, the best word by which to describe the singular noise made by the boy, there was a tremendous roar in answer, and the crimson and gold draperies at one side of the room were thrown aside.

Then four enormous lions, utterly untrammelled by chain or bar, as free of limb as when they trod their native forests, bounded into the room and crouched at Neil's feet.

It was this act that caused the great demonstration which we have previously noticed.

The boy stood in the center of the circle of crouching lions, any one of whom, it seemed, might tear him to pieces in a single instant, undaunted, and with nerves as firm and cool as a veteran's.

The applause is tumultuous, and does not cease when the boy suddenly utters that peculiar sound again, and holds out his right arm, over which, in succession, leap the four monarchs of the jungle.

Then he stands erect, and holding out both arms, makes the signal.

The lions spring over his outstretched arms, two and two in opposite directions, and then crouch down before him, awaiting further signals.

Then they all leap rapidly over his right arm, one after the other,

running around him and springing over the other arm in the other direction.

He cracks his whip and shouts, and they increase their speed, flying about him in quick circles, when, of a sudden, he drops upon one knee.

"Ugh!"

The lions crouch and then leap towards him.

A shudder goes through that vast audience as they imagine that the heroic boy is doomed to a fearful death.

Not so.

His large, piercing eyes are fixed upon the brutes, and he knows full well that they dare not hurt him.

He has them under the most perfect control, and can play with them as if they were so many frisky kittens.

At the signal they leap toward, but not upon him, flying over his head in graceful curves.

He suddenly cracks his whip in a peculiar manner, and one of the huge beasts falls prone in the center of the ring.

He leaps upon the creature's head, resting one foot upon it and the other upon his body.

"Ugh!"

The three others leap over his head with a terrible roar, which creates an instant hush in the packed auditorium, every person expecting to see him torn to pieces.

Again they are agreeably disappointed.

He cracks his whip once more, and another lion falls as if dead by the side of the other.

Neil stands with either foot upon the heads of the recumbent beasts, and the others leap over his head. This time they come from opposite sides, one under the other, and the boy half kneels as he utters the peculiar guttural.

Another crack of the whip, and all four lions are stretched out upon the ground, apparently lifeless.

The boy springs to the ground in the center of the prostrate forms of the forest kings, as they are misnamed, and draws a pistol from some part of his costume where it had been deftly concealed all the while.

He fires four shots in rapid succession over his head.

The lions instantly spring to their feet and utter a resounding roar.

Neil cracks his whip, and they all stand in a circle about him, upon their hind legs, their gaping jaws wide open, and their enormous paws clutching the air.

He walked around the narrow space cracking his whip, and they draw back, widening the circle.

He seems to look at each lion simultaneously; cracking his whip, muttering uncouth sounds, turning quickly from side to side, every motion revealing the sinewy lines and graceful curves of his lithe form to the best advantage.

He is slight, and not much over five feet four inches high, but he is perfectly compact, and though there is not a superfluous ounce of flesh upon his whole body, he does not appear spare by any means.

His unique costume becomes him perfectly, and one can easily imagine him to be a Hercules in miniature, holding the raging brutes in submission by the simple power of will.

Thus we see the superiority of human over brute intelligence, and it is the knowledge of this fact that makes the lad so successful.

Turning swiftly and gracefully, he snaps his whip, and the lions, still standing erect, retreat foot by foot until he can swing his whip clear of them all.

He folds his arms, draws himself together, and stamps one foot.

The lions squat upon their haunches, folding their paws across their chests, and closing their distended jaws.

The lad walks toward the first, and says a few words in some incomprehensible language.

The brute opens wide his jaws, and in a moment the lad inserts his head into the awful cavern.

A silence as of death pervades the place, not the slightest noise being heard.

With horror-stricken eyes, pale cheeks, and bated breath, the vast multitude gazes upon the apparently rash deed, expecting nothing but that the daring youth will meet a fearful fate.

The mighty jaws slowly approach each other, and stop just as the white teeth reach the boy's neck.

Then they open again, and the boy releases his head, while a general breath of relief is drawn.

Neil smiles to the audience, pats the brute upon the head, and drops some delicate morsel into his jaws.

"Ah, this is the power of kindness," say the philosophers.

It is nothing of the sort.

Kindness is utterly thrown away upon savage brutes unless accompanied by a display of the will, and the making them understand that the man is the master, and that the brute must obey, without question.

Of this matter more anon.

Neil performs the same feat in succession with the other three lions, varying it occasionally by seizing the jaws of the brute with both hands, and while holding them open, thrusting his head in between them.

When he has gone the rounds he suddenly snaps his whip, and the brutes go flying around the ring in a mad chase.

In succession he causes them to leap through paper hoops and fiery rings, and across banners and burdles, climb steps, stand upon pedestals, ring bells, fire off pistols, and many other feats usually performed by horses.

Suddenly the draperies are thrown aside and a huge cage appears in sight, into which at a signal the beasts bound, and are locked in, after which the curtains are drawn, and, with a bow and a smile, the young wild-beast tamer disappears in the midst of a perfect torrent of applause.

He is called out again and again, responding with bows and smiles to the deafening cheers, until at last four clowns rush into the ring and run at him.

He cracks his whip at them, whereupon they sit upon the ground with their legs distended and mouths open, and give vent to a comical roar.

The audience laughs, and Neil runs off, while the clowns give a comical performance previous to the introduction of a startling act of equestrianism by the principal riders of the company.

We have seen the young wild-beast tamer in his marvelous performance which he repeats every afternoon and evening to delighted thousands, and now let us review somewhat his past life.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE TWO CLOWNS FOUND—OUR HERO'S EARLY EXPLOITS—THE LIONS.

"You must understand, ladies and gentlemen," says the ring-master, previous to every performance by the boy, "that these lions are not superannuated, toothless old beasts that have been traveling around the world for the last twenty years, and have no life left in them.

"Upon the contrary, they were taken from their native jungles less than two years ago, and captured at great risk of life for a rival show.

"These magnificent specimens of the brute creation appeared to be perfectly untameable, and caused no end of trouble, many valuable lives being sacrificed by them.

"Here you see an instance of American enterprise. Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum buy these beasts. Young Grizzly Adams tames them, and makes them the unique feature of a unique show.

"This young lad, scarcely fifteen years of age, possesses a remarkable faculty for subduing wild beasts, having given exhibitions of his peculiar talent when but a child of four years.

"He holds those monsters of the jungle in the most complete subjection, and no one need fear the slightest accident, for be assured, ladies and gentlemen, that if there were the slightest danger we would never let loose four lions into our ring to, perhaps, destroy no end of human lives.

"It is the artist's undoubted powers that inspire us with confidence, and we know that under his penetrating gaze the brutes will not dare to do violence. I have now the pleasure of introducing to your attention the great American wonder, Young Grizzly Adams, the wild-beast tamer."

While this grandiloquent speech always pleased the audiences

mightily, it was not strictly true in all respects, Neil being really eighteen years of age.

The purchase of the lions also, which had really been tamed by Neil, as a matter of fact, was not exactly as had been stated, but as boys always like to have a story "begin at the beginning," we will proceed at once in due form to set before our readers the main events of our hero's life, from his earliest recollections up to the time when we run across him in Australia.

"Hark, Dan, don't you hear something?"

"No; come ahead."

"But I tell you I do."

"Nonsense; it's growing late and beginning to rain; we shall get wet, and then I shall have a touch of rheumatism."

"That'll only make the people laugh more at the 'grotesque contortions of the inimitable Dan Rice,' as the papers say."

"Yes, confound 'em, all the time I'm almost ready to holler with the pain. That's all they know about— Halloo!"

The famous clown suddenly stopped short in the path, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

He was on his way to the hotel after the circus performance, in company with his assistant clown, one George Adams by name, but known to the profession by another title, when the above conversation took place.

The great Dan Rice Combination was traveling through the West, and had stopped for a day at Columbus, Indiana, then a less flourishing place than at present.

The night was dark and threatening as Dan had said, and the great clown had no notion of getting a touch of his agreeable rheumatism, and so rather hurried Adams, who wished to investigate the sound which he had heard.

Suddenly Dan struck his foot against something lying in the path, and jumped back as if stung by a serpent.

Adams stooped down and picked up a bundle wrapped in an old shawl.

The bundle was a live male child, little more than a year old.

"Well, I never!" said Adams; "it's a baby, Dan, and a pretty little fellow, too, as well as I can see by the light."

"What are you going to do with it, George?"

"Keep it."

"Keep it! Ah!" laughed Dan Rice, as he walked along, "it's lucky you are not a married man, ha, ha! Do as you like, George, but if I was you, I wouldn't be bothered with it."

Adams carried the child, whose cries had been the sound he had heard, to the hotel, where a closer examination was made.

He was a pretty little fellow indeed, and made no fuss, laughing and crowing and showing great affection for the man who had picked him up from his singular place of deposit.

There were no marks whatever upon his person or clothes, no jewelry or other ornaments by which he might have been identified, and it was evident that he had been abandoned utterly.

Adams made numerous inquiries in Columbus concerning the boy, but learned nothing there nor while the show was in the neighborhood.

At Cambridge, Richmond, Indianapolis, and other places in the vicinity, he resumed his inquiries, having left word with the hotel keeper at Columbus to forward any information he might pick up.

There was none, however, and at the end of a week Adams found himself the sole possessor of a healthy child, who had grown to love him devotedly, and who already, in his childish dialect, had begun to call him "da-da" in the most entrancing manner.

Adams was equally fond of the boy, whom he legally adopted at the end of the season.

He was christened Neil Adams, and as the clown would not be separated from him, was relegated to the care of a nurse, and traveled with his foster-father wherever he went.

Dan Rice, with characteristic generosity, made him a present of one hundred dollars, and offered to make it five hundred if Adams would call the boy after him.

This the clown would not consent to, but made a compromise, bestowing the name of Neil Rice Adams upon the child, who was thus duly registered.

We skip a few years, and proceed to the time when Neil was five years old.

At this time he displayed his remarkable faculty for taming animals, and had every cat and dog in the neighborhood so trained that they would do almost anything he would tell them.

It was most amusing to see him, seated upon a low stool, putting half a dozen kittens through their exercises, making them stand on their hind legs and beg, pretend to be dead, box, dance, and do a dozen other comical tricks.

He would handle the most poisonous snakes at the age of seven, without the slightest fear, and would charm them so that they were perfectly harmless.

He was introduced to the ring as a boy rider, but he did not fancy that part of the business, and much preferred to watch the wild animals in their cages, talking to, and somehow or other seeming to enter into a most perfect understanding with them.

His father still continued to be a clown, although he had left Dan Rice, who for a time had retired from active life, to resume it again after an interval of some years.

Neil's education was by no means neglected all this time, and having learned to read, he eagerly devoured every book he could get hold of which treated of animals, and more particularly the savage and untameable ones.

When he was ten years old he had no fear of entering the cage of lions—old, comparatively harmless fellows, and performing, in conjunction with Pearce, the celebrated lion-tamer, until at last he conceived a strong desire to tame wild beasts himself.

One season, while traveling through the Far West, a man brought in a grizzly bear which had been captured by some hunters.

Neil took this creature in hand, and by dint of perseverance and untiring patience finally succeeded in taming it, and after that he and the bear were inseparable companions.

He was called Young Grizzly after that, and rather liked the name, and for several years he exhibited that bear throughout the country, until one day, longing for its mountain home, it escaped and was shot by a hunter.

Our hero then turned his attention to wild beast taming, and regularly performed in a den of lions or tigers, the name of Young Grizzly Adams sticking to him and making him popular on account of the original of that name, whose exploits are known to every boy in the land.

Adams and his son were the best of friends, and loved each other more than ever father and son loved, each being proud of and doing his best to please the other.

Neil and his father traveled all over the United States and Europe, performing before the crowned heads and gaining fame and fortune.

They came across Hooker & Ketchum, who had established a purely American circus, and were at once engaged and went everywhere.

An Englishman who owned a large establishment, and who had struggled vainly against failure, owed the proprietors of the American Circus a large sum of money which they had no hopes of getting.

In his possession were four powerful lions which no one could manage, and which had already killed a number of people.

Mr. Hooker met the Englishman in Melbourne, Australia, and offered to take the lions as payment of his claim.

The Englishman snapped at the offer in a minute, although the animals were worth much more than the sum given for them.

The brutes were delivered to the proprietors of Hooker & Ketchum's Great American Circus, who presently found that they had an elephant upon their hands, so to speak.

The Englishman chuckled, and said to one of his enemies:

"Them blarsted h'Americans are taken in, you know, demme. Them h'animals will h'eat their 'eads h'off in h'a month."

"Baw Jove, me deah fellah, you're quite wight. They do feed most h'awfully, ye know."

"Blowed h'if I could stand h'it, ye know, h'and besides which, the brutes was most h'annoying to get h'along with. Hate two men a day h'on h'an h'average."

"These h'American fellahs will bust h'up, baw jove, h'and their boasted h'enterprize will be nowheah."

There was too much truth in the remarks of the two Englishmen to suit Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum, and they found that they had been taken in.

The animals almost literally "ate their heads off," the bill for their food being something enormous, and in addition to this, they were so savage that no one could manage them.

Hooker & Ketchum were debating with each other one day whether they had not better kill them and get rid of the expense at once, when Neil stepped up.

"You are talking about the lions?"

"Yes."

"You can do better than kill them."

"So—so! What is it?"

"Tame them and exhibit them in the ring."

"Ha-ha! I'd like to see any one do it," said Hooker.

"You couldn't get a man to go among them for a million," said Ketchum. "They are as wild as when they were taken, if not worse."

"I'll agree to tame them," said Neil, "and make them as harmless as kittens."

"You?" cried both men in utter surprise.

"Yes, and make their performance one of the features of the show."

"If you will, I'll give you five hundred dollars," said the one.

"And I'll do the same," added the other.

"All right, gentlemen," said Neil. "I'll begin my work to-day, and in a month I guarantee to put my head into their mouths and take it out again without getting a scratch!"

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG LION TAMER'S SUCCESSES—THE DEPARTURE—A STARTLING CRY.

NEIL entered upon his self-appointed task that same day.

Selecting the smallest of the lions, though they were all of good size, being of the variety known as the Yellow Cape, inhabiting South Africa in the region of the Cape of Good Hope, he had him put into a cage by himself.

Instead of treating the beast with unnecessary cruelty at first, which is too often the case, and which was what the beast had become accustomed to, Neil began by using kindness.

It happened that this one was sick, and the boy, finding out what was the matter, applied some simple remedy.

This greatly relieved the beast, and he felt grateful to the lad, and would not growl when he approached the cage.

At last Neil ventured inside, apparently unarmed, and advanced boldly as if fear was the one thing furthest from his thoughts.

He had a knife concealed upon his person, and carried a small whip; but he did not intend to use either unless attacked.

At first the beast regarded the intruder with anger, and seemed about to spring upon the lad.

Neil fastened his large brown eyes upon the lion, and never once removed them, talking all the time in a soothing tone.

He held in his hand a little tid-bit which he knew the lion liked, and in gently modulated accents called the brute to come and take it.

The tone was so different from that ordinarily used that the animal was puzzled, and evidently did not know what to make of it.

He returned Neil's gaze, fiercely at first, but as the boy never once dropped his eyes, but kept them fixed upon him, his own glance softened.

Finally, soothed by the gentle tones, and evidently knowing that Neil had something which would do him good, he walked over to where the boy was awaiting him and took the morsel. Neil still gazing at him intently, and keeping up that peculiar tone, now uttering coaxing words, and then more gutturals.

Neil had picked up a smattering of the Kaffir tongue, and these words he said over and over in every variety of intonation, the gigantic beast gazing upon him with the utmost wonder.

After a few moments the boy withdrew, being well satisfied with the first lesson.

The next day the lion evidently expected him, and would not eat until the boy himself gave him his food.

This time the beast seemed to invite the lad into his cage, and when he entered rubbed against him, fawned upon him, and licked his hand.

Neil gave him a lump of sugar, which was evidently something new, and pleased him very much.

Becoming rather familiar, however, Neil spoke to him in a half severe, half kindly tone, and immediately left the cage.

The lion seemed to feel that he had offended the boy, and tried to coax him to re-enter the cage, but Neil would not notice him all day, talking to the other lions instead, and giving them little dainties.

The animal saw this and appeared to be very much ashamed; and when Neil came in the next day with his medicine, he behaved quite properly, allowing the lad to pat his head, sit on his broad shoulders, and even lift up his paw, which had been cut by a knife, and which Neil had healed.

In time the beast grew very fond of his young trainer, but seemed to want to rejoin his companions.

Neil led him into a cage in which one of the other lions had been placed, and at first the other beast resented it, and growled furiously at the boy, though he did not attempt to molest him.

The first lion walked up to the other and seemed to be holding a council with him, for presently the second ceased growling and allowed Neil to approach him.

He was a treacherous beast, however, and when Neil came near rushed upon him with a savage growl.

Quick as a flash the boy drew his whip and gave him a cut across the face.

His eyes were fixed upon the beast with a stern, penetrating gaze which never faltered, while in low tones he commanded him to retreat.

The beast raised one paw as if to strike, and in an instant Neil struck the offending member, and that only, with his whip, never once releasing his gaze from the animal.

The huge creature cowered, slunk away, and lay down in the remotest corner, utterly abashed.

He was conquered.

The boy then changed his tactics, and treated the brute kindly, and finally departed, leaving the two lions alone.

These two he called Castor and Pollux, after two famous twins of mythology.

There was an evident understanding between the two brutes after that, for when Neil came to the cage next day, Pollux, as the one latest tamed had been named, was perfectly satisfied, and seemed as much delighted as the other at seeing him.

By degrees he brought the two lions to a perfect state of subjection, not neglecting the other two meanwhile, and after a time Castor and Pollux would allow him to lead them from their cage, up an incline and upon the top of a gorgeous procession wagon, where they would sit during a street parade.

This proved to be a great attraction, and drew hundreds to the show who otherwise would not have gone.

Gradually the lad had trained the two lions so that they could perform tricks, and introduced them into the ring, where they proved an immense card.

The other two, whom he had named Nero and Leander, seeing that their fellows were having a good time, finally concluded to behave themselves.

Neil worked with untiring patience, and by treating the beasts with kindness, praising them whenever they did anything well, and punishing them instantly when they offended, never letting them for a moment doubt his superiority to them, and always enforcing the strictest obedience, showing them, too, that he trusted them, succeeded within the prescribed time in accomplishing his task.

It was a happy day for George Adams when his adopted son first introduced his thrilling performance with four unfettered lions in the ring, and to Neil himself, his triumph was worth more to him than the thousand dollars which Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum had paid over to him.

The lions proved an instantaneous and electric success, and the circus actually coined money wherever it went.

Making the tour of Australia, they went over to Van Dieman's Land and New Zealand, and finally returned once more to Australia, which proved a land of gold indeed to them.

Neil was constantly teaching his pets new tricks, and at the end of a year his performance, an entertainment in itself worth twice the price of admission, had reached that complete and well-rounded form, such as we have described it.

The lions, from being a heavy expense, became one of the most

popular features of the show, thousands coming to see them who otherwise would have remained away.

None but American artists were employed, thus making the show distinct from all others, and the most unique combination of riders, acrobats, tumblers, jugglers and specialists that had ever been seen in that part of the world.

Australians are proverbial for their generous patronage of anything that is really good, and Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum could have remained there for five years, and made money all the time, had they been so disposed.

The performers began to long for home, however, and so did the proprietors, and the present tour was announced to be the last in Australia previous to their departure for the United States.

At Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, and other places, the crowds were enormous, and when at last the party reached Melbourne, whence they were to take the steamer for San Francisco, the rush to see the daring riders, funny clowns, and above all, the performing lions, of the Great American Circus, was so great that the proprietors were obliged to delay their departure for a month.

Young Grizzly Adams became the talk of the town; his photograph, and those of his four lions, were exhibited in every shop window, and found a ready sale; and when not performing he was feted to his heart's content by the hospitable inhabitants of Melbourne and vicinity.

The craze extended to all the principal performers, and the fatter the pockets of the worthy proprietors grew, the better were the performances.

"That boy will make the fortune of any manager," remarked Hooker, to his partner. "He's brought us in more business with those lions of his than we've done for five years."

"Tell you what," answered Ketchum, "the luckiest thing we ever did was buying them lions."

"You bet; and old Flashey who sold 'em to us thought he'd stuck us bad."

"So it looked at first; and I thought we had a mighty big elephant on our hands, instead of which we've got a bonanza."

"And all owing to that lad. Tell you what, it'll pay to treat him first-class."

The last performance had been given in Melbourne, the many traps of the show packed away and put aboard the steamer, the wild beast cages lowered into the hold, and the last leave-taking made, one bright morning, Neil standing upon the steamer's deck waving his handkerchief to a party of ladies on the wharf, with whom he had become well acquainted during his stay in the city.

There was quite a large list of cabin passengers, the employees of the circus occupying more than half of the staterooms, and also a considerable number in the steerage.

As Neil stood on deck, one of these latter, a man of say forty-five years of age, having a hardened look, stood in the forward part of the ship, and gazed earnestly toward the lad.

"Cuss him!" he muttered. "It's the same, I'll take my oath! He's going home, is he? Not if I know it."

At last everybody is aboard, the steamer cast off, and with a glad shout from those on shore, moves away from the pier into the harbor, accompanied by a small tugboat.

At last, after some days, the broad expanse of the Pacific Ocean was reached, and the steamer plowed her way gallantly through the clear waters.

Everybody was in excellent spirits, and Neil made many friends among the passengers by his pleasant, gentlemanly ways.

The lions evidently did not mind the voyage as much as it was thought they would, but Neil went down to see them every day, the brutes greeting him with the wildest demonstrations of delight.

One day, when about two weeks out, as Neil was walking the deck, a most appalling cry was heard.

"The lions have broken loose!"

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED BY A LION.

"The lions are loose!"

What a world of meaning there was in that thrilling cry.

It meant a horrible death to those who came in the way of the fierce animals; perhaps an utter panic followed by shipwreck.

Who could foresee the result?

Sailors deserting their posts, officers incapacitated for duty; an engineer unmindful of his responsibility in the face of that terrible danger, an explosion the probable consequence; a frightened crew, terrified passengers; a hasty departure upon rafts or in boats; tedious days upon the ocean without food or water, and at last—death.

All these things flashed through the mind of Neil, as he heard that terrible cry ringing through the ship.

"The lions are loose!"

Something must be done upon the instant.

Where is the sinister-looking man who said that perhaps our hero would never return to his home?

Below in the hold.

What is he doing there?

We shall see.

"Follow me!" cries Neil, with a ringing shout. "Perhaps something may be done yet."

Even at that instant one of the beasts appears on deck.

A young lady, one of the bareback riders of the circus, is within ten feet of the ferocious beast.

He is crouching for a leap, and she, horror-stricken, knows not whether to turn, but stands petrified with fear.

Neil makes one bound forward.

"Ugh!"

The lion hears that peculiar sound, and remains as motionless as though carved from stone.

Neil reaches the young lady's side, and standing between her and death, seizes an iron belaying pin from the rail.

Looking the lion full in the face, he advances a step and commands him to retreat.

The beast slinks away and returns to the hold.

Neil follows.

He hears the shrieks of the terrified steerage passengers, the roars of the lions, and the confused commands of the officers.

"Every man to his post!" he shouts, with the air of one born to command.

He is in the hold and sees the lions crowded together in a body, evidently meditating mischief.

With a fierce cry he is upon them, his ever-ready revolver in one hand, the iron belaying pin in the other.

"Ugh!"

This time it is uttered with a different inflection.

The lions understand it.

With a bound they spring into the cage and lie down quietly in their corners.

All but Castor, Neil's pet, the lion he first tamed, and the most tractable of the whole drove.

Neil pats this beast on the head, talks consolingly to him, and tells him to go back to the cage.

The animal starts, and then suddenly pauses.

Neil again commands, but the beast utters an angry roar, and lashes his brawny sides with his tufted tail.

What can be the matter?

Are the boy's powers failing him at last?

There is but little light in the hold, and objects at any distance are too obscure to be recognized.

The lion, with his cat-like eyes, sees something which the boy cannot.

Suddenly there is a rush, and Neil feels a sharp pain dart through his head.

He reels and falls prone upon the deck of the darkened hold, all sense deserting him.

A man has struck him to the deck, and is even now advancing to complete his work.

Who is it?

The steerage passenger with the hardened look upon his features.

He advances with a look of hate in his eyes, and raises a keen dagger with which to kill the young lion tamer.

Another actor appears, and comes to the defense of the boy.

It is the lion, Castor.

With a roar that resounds through the darkened hold, he springs to Neil's side.

Standing over the prostrate form he raises one huge paw in warning, and growls angrily at the man who, with uplifted knife, stands hesitatingly before him.

The brute has saved the life of the human.

But for him the villain would, in another instant, have plunged his knife into the boy's heart.

Standing guard over the body of his beloved keeper, the lion defies the hardened wretch to advance.

A sound of approaching footsteps is heard, and the baffled villain slinks away into the darkness.

The first officer and a number of sailors carrying lights and weapons, appear in the hold.

The lion is licking Neil's face and whining piteously.

"He has killed the poor boy," says the officer. "Dispatch the brute at once!"

Mr. Hooker now appears.

"Stop, stop!" he cries; "I don't think it is as bad as that. Ah, here is Mr. Adams."

"Neil, my boy!" shouts the old clown. "Are you much hurt?"

The boy bears, and raises his head.

The lion shows every indication of joy, and wags his tail, not in anger, but in pleasure.

Neil half arises and looks about him.

He sees the lion standing guard over him, and puts his hand to his head.

There is blood upon it!

"Castor, old boy," he says, "how did this happen?"

The lion growls.

"Someone struck me and then tried to finish the work, but you would not let them? Is that the case?"

The lion growls, and assumes a defensive attitude.

"Is it any of these?" asks Neil, pointing to his friends, now advancing.

The lion looks at them in an indifferent sort of manner, and then rubs his great head against Neil's leg.

"No, evidently not," says the lad. "Whoever he is we will find him out, old fellow. Now, go back to your cage like a good beast, and I will bring you something nice to eat."

The boy stands upon his feet, and the lion jumps at once into his cage and lies down.

Neil goes up and examines the fastenings while closing the cage.

"Someone has been tampering with these bolts," he says. "They were strong enough to hold a dozen lions."

"Who could have done it?" says Ketchum. "We are always particular about those things. Ah, ha! someone who understands his business has been at work here," he continued, examining the locks and bolts which had not been broken by the lions, as was at first supposed.

"There has been design here," remarked Adams. "Someone has done this to put our lives in danger."

"Rather your son's," said Hooker, "seeing that he was afterwards attacked, and but for the lion must undoubtedly have been killed."

"Who could wish to harm him?" said Adams. "Not any one in the company, I'll be bound!"

"No, indeed!" cried all the members of the troupe present. "Not one of us would hurt a hair of his head."

"Nor any of the crew," spoke up the officer. "We are all as fond of him as you are, gentlemen, and believe me, if the offender is discovered it will go hard with him."

"Send for the blacksmith," said Neil, "and I will see that these bars and fastenings are made sufficiently strong to prevent a second attempt of this kind."

Order was once more restored in the ship, the danger having been surmounted, and then all hands began speculating upon the identity of the person who had done the mischief.

In his quarters in the steerage, the villain communed with himself thus:

"I have failed once, Neil Adams, but the second attempt will be more successful!"

CHAPTER V.

A LION AS A DETECTIVE.

THE young lady whose life Neil had saved, was, as already stated, one of the riders in the company, and was called Edna Dart.

Her ring title was Mlle Rayon, but as we shall have occasion to speak of her more than once during the course of this veracious narrative, we shall call her simply Edna.

Edna, then, was sitting upon the promenade-deck, under the shade of an awning, an hour or so later, awaiting the appearance of Neil.

The work below had been all finished in a satisfactory manner, and a guard ordered to be stationed over the cages day and night, in order to prevent any repetitions of the scenes in the morning.

But for Neil's prompt action, it was more than likely that the other wild animals would have become excited and broken out, in which case they would have all had to be sacrificed, and there was no telling how many human lives might have been lost before quiet had been established.

Arraying himself in a becoming suit of white linen, for the weather was quite warm, Neil came upon deck, and seeing Edna, walked over toward her.

"Have you recovered from your fright, Miss Dart?" asked the lad, raising his straw hat.

"You have saved my life, Mr. Adams," cried the young girl, springing to her feet, and seizing his hand. "How can I repay your kindness?"

"By calling me Neil, instead of Mr. Adams," said he, smiling.

"Then you must call me Edna," replied she.

"With all my heart."

Then they both sat down opposite each other, she half reclining in an easy steamer chair, her white lace parasol above her head, and he in a camp chair, his hat pushed back from his forehead, and a silk handkerchief about his throat, for they were in the tropics yet, and the heat was nearly unendurable.

Somehow or other, though, they seemed to forget this as they sat in the shady part of the deck, conversing and knowing nothing of what was going on about them.

In fact, here was the beginning of a very pretty romance, and though neither knew it, they were already deeply in love.

Edna was about the same height as Neil, though slight in figure, and had the fairest complexion ever seen; her eyes being a pale, bluish gray tint, and her hair a lovely auburn, looking like a mass of wavy sunbeams.

She was as graceful and lithe as a willow, and was one of the attractions of the circus, second only to Neil himself, and fully as accomplished in her line as he was in his.

"Don't you get afraid of those horrid beasts sometimes?" she asked him. "I should think you would be afraid of your life every time you perform."

"You do not become frightened, do you," replied Neil, "when you go sweeping around the ring on your favorite steed, while the thunders of applause ring in your ears?"

"I do not have time," she answered, naively, "and then I love Jack so that I know he will be careful, and always do his best."

"So do I love my lions, and am too busy to think of the danger, though I know I run a great risk. Castor would not hurt me, I know, but I don't feel so sure about the others."

"Have you any idea who set them loose?"

"None whatever. I did not fancy that I had an enemy in the whole world until now. I am sure I do not know what the person's motive could have been."

"It is a very mysterious case."

"Very. Suppose we talk about something else."

The young people had many interviews after that, particularly on moonlight nights, when the air was soft and balmy, and everything in harmony with their young thoughts, sea and sky tranquil, with no premonition of danger, no threatenings of shipwreck, but all peaceful and serene.

The voyage, like all other voyages, except that of the poor, unfortunate Flying Dutchman, was bound to come to an end, and finally did, the troupe disembarking at San Francisco, and preparing at once to make a triumphal march across the continent.

Two or three days were required for practice, and then the company were going to start in fresh at the beginning of the week, and perform for a fortnight.

The city was duly billed and placarded, and great things were expected, it being needless to add that the expectations were more than realized.

On the first night after the arrival, Neil was walking along Leavenworth street, when he saw a shabby-looking man just going into a large drinking saloon.

As he disappeared, the man cast a glance of hate at Neil, which the latter observed and wondered at.

He puzzled himself to think where he had met that man, and presently he remembered him distinctly.

He had been a steerage passenger in the steamer, and Neil had more than once seen that baleful glance directed at him.

"Who can he be, and what can he mean?" thought Neil. "I must watch him."

He entered the place and saw the man, after having taken a drink, departing by another entrance.

"Do you know that man?" he asked of one of the bartenders, pointing to him.

"His name is Robbins, I think. I never saw him before to-day, as I can recollect; but he has been in several times already, and has a number of cronies, and I heard them call him Robbins."

"Thank you," said Neil. "He looked at me as if I ought to know him, and I thought if I heard his name I might recollect him."

"Do you?"

"No; not in the least."

"He ain't much to know. This is the first drink he's paid for to-day. Waited half an hour this morning for someone to treat him."

"Then I surely don't know him. Much obliged to you, all the same. Come up and see me next week," and Neil tossed the man a couple of "complimentaries" to the circus.

It was the opening day and an hour previous to the ring performance, quite a number having gathered even then, to see the menagerie, and particularly the "four African lions, brought to a perfectly harmless condition by the great wild beast tamer, Young Grizzly Adams."

Neil himself was walking about, dressed in street costume, and unrecognized by the crowd of admiring sightseers.

Suddenly he saw ahead of him the man called Robbins, although the latter did not observe him.

"I will watch him," thought Neil, and followed the man carelessly, keeping a few people between himself and the man, so that if the latter should chance to turn suddenly, he would not be observed.

The man walked on without turning around, and presently arrived before the huge, strongly-barred cage, containing the leonine performers, when he paused and began looking at them.

There were others doing the same thing, a rope being stretched in front of the cage at a distance of about four feet, to prevent people from putting their hands on the bars, or poking their sticks and umbrellas at the beasts, a habit which some people have, we are sorry to say.

Two of the lions were asleep, one was sitting up, gazing with indifference at the people, and the fourth, Nero, by the way, was walking restlessly up and down the cage.

Castor was asleep, but as the hardened-looking man paused in front of him, he suddenly sprang up, sniffed the air, and rushed to the front of the cage.

Neil was standing near and saw the whole incident.

Castor, espousing Robbins, darted an angry glance at him, and roared savagely, thrusting out one huge paw as if anxious to get at the man.

The people around the cage uttered a series of terrified shrieks and fled, the man Robbins retreating hastily.

Neil calmed the savage beast by a word, and then as he walked away, he muttered to himself:

"That is the man who freed the lions and tried to kill me. Now, I am forewarned."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LION DETECTIVE REMEMBERS AN ENEMY, AND NEIL PREVENTS A CATASTROPHE.

THE performance that afternoon and evening put the show on a good financial footing at once, and the promise was a golden one.

Neil was pronounced "the best yet," and his ears were fairly split with the thunders of applause showered upon him.

He put his "pets," as he denominated them, through the whole of their exercise, caressed them, gave them little dainties, and talked pleasantly to them, at the same time never letting them forget for a second that he was their master, and demanded implicit obedience.

His part of the programme was generally toward the end, and previous to appearing he would, after he was dressed for the ring, spend some ten or fifteen minutes with the animals, in order to get them in trim for their performance.

Edna came on for an act, after the lions had retired, the four clowns doing a little interlude between the two, and she always took a good share of the applause which Neil had received.

She was as graceful as a fairy, and seemed to be a part of her horse, so well did she ride, doing the most graceful feats with an ease that made them seem the simplest things imaginable.

Every afternoon and evening the tents were packed to their fullest capacity, hundreds being turned away, and the genial proprietors congratulated themselves upon their instantaneous success.

The expense of maintaining such an extensive organization was something enormous, and a week's bad business at the beginning of the season would have nearly swamped them.

It had cost considerable to bring the company over from Australia, and it needed a good run of business to regain this, and give them a good start.

The first three or four days' business settled all doubts upon this point, and as the receipts swelled, the feelings of all, proprietors, performers and helpers, kept pace with them.

Neil was the hero of the hour, and not a young lady in the city but had his photograph in ring costume, surrounded by his lions, displayed in a conspicuous place; and if he received one sweet note he got a hundred of them every day.

He had seen Robbins once or twice since the opening day, and although it was generally in the circus tent, he never came within sight of the lions but what there was an uproar at once.

Neil was generally on hand to quiet Castor with a gentle word and some tidbit or another, and always managed to quiet the disturbance almost immediately.

Upon one of these occasions Neil followed the man, and when they were beyond the crowd, said, quietly:

"My lions don't seem to like you, sir."

"No, curse them, I believe that smallest one would like to tear me to pieces."

"You must have offended him in some way. He does not treat others so, scarcely notices them, in fact."

"I never saw the brute before. Why should he be offended?"

Neil said nothing, but gave the man a peculiar look, which he understood thoroughly.

He knew that Neil was perfectly aware that he was lying, but the boy simply said, pleasantly:

"I would advise you not to go too near him, for it will only frighten the people and excite the beast. I cannot always be by to quiet him."

"Are you the young man that performs in the ring with those lions?"

"As if you didn't know I was," said Neil to himself, answering simply in the affirmative.

"Yours is certainly a wonderful performance. Are you never afraid that they will hurt you?"

"On the contrary, we are great friends, and the fellow that dislikes you so much saved my life not long ago."

"Indeed?" grunted the man, as if doubting the truth of the statement. "You must feel obliged to him."

"I do, for he is a keen detective, as well as my protector. If the other lions should by any means cut up rough, that one would take my part."

"Ha, ha! very wonderful, indeed! And you say he is a detective?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Because he discovered to me the man who attempted my life," said Neil, adding, with intensity, "and that man had better be careful if that lion sees him when he is loose!"

Robbins shuddered, and soon left Neil, mixing in with the crowd.

"The wretch knows I have spotted him," muttered Neil, "and will be careful how he acts hereafter. If Castor sees him when he is

in the ring, I doubt if I could be able to hold him in until he had torn the villain to pieces. I might, but I doubt it!"

The next night after this conversation, what was Neil's horror to see the man sitting in one of the front rows, and where he was in plain sight from the ring.

Fortunately he saw him before making his entrance, and going to the assistants, told them not by any means to let Castor out when they opened the cage, but to keep him in a corner.

Then he ran to Mr. Hooker, and briefly related the circumstance of the lion's having discovered the man to be his master's mysterious assailant.

"I daren't let him see the fellow, for he would certainly kill him," said Neil. "I shall have to perform without him, and that is dangerous, because he keeps the others in check."

"Serve the scamp right if he did get eaten up," said Hooker, "but of course, we can't have that. The business would be ruined. I'll bet a dollar that the fellow would like to see those three brutes misbehave and hurt you some way."

"I know he would. I shall go in without Castor, and watch the others more closely than ever. Have someone make the announcement."

"What will they say?"

"Oh, anything; say he's sick, or got the toothache, or rheumatism."

"All right; I'll speak to your father about it."

Just before Neil went into the ring, Adams came forward and made the following announcement:

"Ladies and gentlemen, fellow congressmen, brother reprobates, boys, girls and infants:—The lion Castor has got a stomach-ache, and his kind master does not consider it proper that he should perform to night, as, moreover, there are several officers of the Society for the Prevention of Brains present. Consequently we have given him a dose of Castor oil; see the point?—and trust by to-morrow afternoon he will be ready to continue his remarkable performance. You will now see the infant phenomenon play with his three fiery, untamed kittens. Houp-la!"

He sprang from the ring amid a tumult of laughter and applause, and the next moment the band struck up some wild, barbaric music, and Neil rode in on his chariot.

The three lions went through their performances, Neil never letting his eyes off them, and keeping them strictly to their business.

The whip was snapped oftener than usual, the foot stamped more frequently, and every nerve and fibre strained to its utmost to prevent the least outbreak.

The lions knew that Neil would have nothing but the strictest discipline, and he displayed his power to the utmost.

Everything went off well, and at last the lions were sent back to their quarters for the night.

The lad saw a shade of disappointment cross the face of Robbins, and after the act of the lions he left the building.

"Take care, my friend," said Neil, as he saw the man go out, and then went himself to his dressing-room. "I shall not always protect you from my tawny pet; for if you provoke me, I'll turn him loose on you, as I'm a sinner!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUNNY GENTLEMAN—THE REBUFF.

It was the last week of the stay of the circus in San Francisco. The attendance had been unprecedented, and everybody was happy. Neil had been particularly so, on account of the frequent tender interviews he had with Edna after the performance was concluded.

He was sauntering along the streets one morning, taking an airing, when a middle-aged, respectable-looking gentleman suddenly accosted him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but have I not seen you before?" inquired the gentleman.

"I presume likely."

"Where was it?"

"In the circus, most likely."

"In the circus?"

"Yes. I have been performing here for nearly two weeks."

"But I have only just arrived from China this morning."

"I was there a year ago."

"I never go to the circus."

"No? You don't know what you have missed," with a pleasant smile.

"Excuse my interest—curiosity, perhaps, you may call it—but would you tell me your name?"

"Neil Adams, or Young Grizzly Adams, on the bills."

"Adams? Are you not mistaken?"

"No, sir."

"It's very strange; I can't make it out at all. Who is your father?"

"One George Adams, a clown in the circus."

"Indeed! How old a man is he?"

"About your age, I should think."

"And you are how old?"

"Eighteen, they tell me, though of course I cannot swear to that."

"No, indeed. This man is your own father?"

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"Would you mind asking him?"

"Not at all."

"And could you meet me at the Occidental to-night after the show, and tell me the result of your inquiries?"

"I suppose I could."

"Will you?" asked the gentleman, greatly excited.

"I don't know," said Neil, doubtfully, not altogether satisfied if the man were a friend or an enemy. "Why are you so particular about it?"

"I have my reasons."

"But you prefer not to mention them?"

"Well, no, not at present, at least. Meet me to-night, and if the answer is as I expect, I will tell you all."

"Very well, sir. Good-morning."

"And you will meet me?"

"Perhaps."

"Confound it!" muttered the gentleman, as Neil disappeared in the crowd, "why couldn't I have told him what I think? He may not be the one, though, and I don't want to be taken in by an impostor. He looks honest, though, and not one of that sort."

He walked along slowly, and presently began musing again.

"In the circus, eh? I don't like that—wish he was somewhere else. Very natural, though, after all. I must follow this up. He seems to regard me with suspicion. Can't make it out at all."

In a few moments he suddenly brushed against a man, in his abstraction, and turned to make an apology.

Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and grasped the other man's hand warmly.

"Why, bless my soul! Alonzo Crowell, as I live! How are you, old fellow? Delighted to see you!"

"Mr. Wentworth! Where did you spring from?"

"China; only got in this morning. Busy?"

"No; not very."

"Come in here. I want to talk to you. Still in the detective line?"

"Yes."

"Then you're the very man I want! Come in here; I've got a job for you."

Wentworth led the way into a hotel, and the two men sat down in a retired corner by themselves.

"Now, see here," said the old gentleman, hurriedly, "you remember, don't you, about my having lost—Stop, stop; have a cigar?"

"I don't mind."

"Well, I do. So here goes; light? All right. Let me see, where was it?"

"I really couldn't tell you."

"Oh, I know. I had a son stolen from me some years ago; you remember it, don't you?"

"You have told me so, I believe."

"I always fancied that the boy was dead. Run around so much, you know, can't think of anything. Neglected the little fellow, I suppose, too bad of me, I declare!"

"You think now that, perhaps, he is still alive?"

"That's it, that's it! I declare, you detective fellows always know what a man's thinking about. Seventeen years is a long time, eh?"

"Yes."

"Seventeen years," mused the old gentleman, slowly. "Been all around the world since then; come home now to settle down—want somebody to spend my money for me. Funny, ain't it?"

" You'll have no trouble finding one. There are lots of young fellows who'd be delighted to do it."

" So there are, yes, indeed, lots of 'em—lots! Tell you what, though, want to take my pick; not a bad notion, eh?"

" No, indeed!"

" Now, look here," in short, quick tones. " That boy of mine is alive—know it, feel sure of it. Find him, eh, if I give you a few hints?"

" I will endeavor to."

" That's good—very good! Hunt him up; bring him to me! Give you a thousand dollars! Enough?"

" I should think so. Have you got anything to work upon?"

" Yes, of course. Saw the boy myself this morning!"

" Why under the sun didn't you tell him then?"

" Hum! Funny—ain't it? The young cub snubbed me! Asked him to meet me to-night—what do you suppose he said? 'Perhaps,' with an excellent imitation of Nell's manner.

" Are you sure it was he?"

" Well, no, not exactly—that is—that's what I want you to find out. Seventeen years is a good while—babies sometimes change, you know. Still, those eyes, and the mouth. By jove, there can't be any mistake! Pity if I don't know my own child! Swear to it!"

" Do you know the young gentleman's name?"

" Ahal there you are again! Quite forgot where I was going! To be sure—asked him for it! Queer name, too—Grizzly, Young Grizzly—odd, ain't it?"

" Young Grizzly Adams, do you mean?"

" By George, that's it! Neil Adams, alias—the other thing. Can't remember these barbarous circus names! What an idea—call a boy after a bear—shocking!"

" He tamed a grizzly bear when quite a lad, I understand, and so they call him after that incident."

" Don't say so! By George—his mother was fond of all sorts of queer things—same boy, I tell you! Not a doubt of it! Go and see him; tell him I'm worth seven or eight hundred thousands—want someone to spend it for me—paternal feelings and all—work it up! Understand!"

" Can you prove positively that he is your son? Any birthmarks or jewelry, marks on clothing?"

" Birth marks? No—all nonsense—didn't tattoo him with his full name and address, either—heard of such things—all foolishness! Gold watch and chain, diamond rings and all that? Not a bit of it—clothes marked, that's all—wife did that, poor thing—said we'd be sure to find him some time. Died in that belief."

" You say his features are like yours?"

" Like mine? No, indeed—nice looking he'd be, wouldn't he? Like his mother's—got her picture here somewhere. Oh, I know—at the hotel! Come and see me this afternoon!"

" What do you want me to do in the meantime?"

" See the boy—find out whether old Adams is really his father, if not, where he got him. My boy was stolen seventeen years ago—just about—from central New York. Clothes were marked 'N. W.' not northwest, but Nathaniel Wentworth. Understand?"

" Perfectly. I will see the lad at once."

" Good! Don't mind any expense."

Crowell called to see Neil that afternoon at the circus, but was refused admission at the dressing-rooms.

In the evening he met with the same rebuff, though he sent in an urgent note, which Neil threw aside after a hasty perusal.

In the next morning's papers the two following notices were printed.

" INFORMATION WANTED.—Of Nathaniel Wentworth, stolen from his parents seventeen years ago. Supposed to be now in the circus business. Call on Crowell, No. — Leavenworth street, San Francisco."

" PERSONAL.—If N. A. will call at the Occidental to-day, he will hear of something to his advantage. ROBBINS."

" They are all in the plot," said Neil " and I won't have anything to do with them. I didn't think that of the old gentleman."

CHAPTER VIII.

AGAIN ON THE TRACK—SUBDUCING A HYENA.

THE Great American Circus of Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum was performing in Sacramento City, where the stay was to be for a week, long stops paying well in such places.

Neil was sitting on the piazza of the hotel, awaiting the time when he should have to go to the tent for the afternoon performance, as he now appeared in the grand *entree*, riding in a chariot drawn by two lions, when someone approached.

It was the detective, Crowell.

Neil distrusted the man, and had not seen him since he had left San Francisco, having already been in Sacramento four days.

As the man advanced, Neil arose and turned toward the door.

" I beg your pardon," said Crowell, in a gentlemanly tone. " You are called Neil Adams, are you not?"

" Yes," said Neil, shortly, not at all in his usual pleasant manner.

" Could you grant me a few minutes' conversation?"

" Not now."

" I won't take over a minute. I only want to ask—"

" You really must excuse me," said Neil, walking toward the door. " I must go at once to the circus and attend to my lions."

" Really, now, you have more than an hour to spare."

Neil was in the doorway by this time, and, turning half around, he said, satirically:

" As you seem to know so much about my business, it's a wonder you don't go into it."

Then he went up to his room and remained for half an hour.

Crowell was still on the piazza when he came down, but jumping into a carriage which stood at hand, the boy was driven rapidly away.

" Confound it!" muttered Crowell, " I must get in a word. I wonder why he treats me so coldly? I cannot understand it."

In the afternoon, when the show was out, he again tried to speak to Neil, but the latter went at once to his room, leaving word that he would see no one.

After dinner Neil sat in the shade with his feet upon the piazza-rail, reading a newspaper, when Crowell again approached.

Neil glanced past the man and saw the disreputable Robbins, partly concealed by a tree, gazing at him.

That decided him.

" Will you speak to me now?" asked the detective.

" No; so you may as well go off with your accomplice."

" My accomplice?" he repeated, in astonishment, as Neil arose to his feet. " I don't understand you."

" Oh, no, of course not, but I understand you perfectly," answered Neil, dryly.

" Will you tell me simply if you are or are not the—"

" Missing link? No; I am not. There he stands—that dirty-looking fellow that you honor with your confederacy! Good-evening."

Neil was gone in a moment, and Crowell, turning, saw Robbins walking away.

He posted after him in a moment.

" See here!" he cried, catching hold of the fellow; " who are you?"

" That's my business!" growled Robbins. " Take you hands off; you will soil my coat."

" Well, I never!" said the detective; " you're a rum one."

" Do you want to treat?"

" I don't mind," answered the other, thinking that possibly he might get some information out of this odd character.

As the two walked away in company, Neil came out upon the piazza and saw them.

" To be sure," he muttered. " I knew they were in league with each other."

The next day was Saturday, and he kept secluded all day, except, of course, when he was at the circus, but then no one could come in his way to see him.

Neil saw no more of the detective during his stay in Sacramento, and hoped that he had seen the last of him.

In the course of a week or so the show stopped at Carson City and did a good business.

On the second day, as the boy was about entering the hotel, having walked from the circus grounds, he came face to face with Crowell.

" Will you tell me whether you are the son of Mr. Adams, the clown?" he asked, abruptly.

" That is none of your business," said Neil, and immediately went into the house.

"Rebuffed again, by Jove!" muttered the detective. "It beats all that I can't get in a word. I'll have to disguise myself."

Now that Neil knew the man was on his track again, he kept himself secluded, and when he went to the circus always took a carriage, returning by the same means.

The next day, which was the last of their stay in this place, he saw Crowell at a distance, and avoided him as before.

In the evening the tents were packed to suffocation, the performance being vociferously applauded.

Neil came in with his lions, and also introduced a new act, which was well received.

One side of the ring was built up with a lot of set-rocks, and at the base was encamped a party of gypsies.

They fall asleep, and one leaves a child by the fire. Presently a hunter approaches, seizes the child, and bears it away.

As he does so, four lions rush upon him, and one seizes the child in his mouth, and rushes off.

The hunter fights with the three lions, and kills them, and then giving chase to the other, forces him to surrender the child.

The gypsies awake and attack him; but he, declaring that they have stolen the child from him, fights them valiantly.

He is about to be overpowered when the fourth lion comes to his assistance, and the gypsies retreat, while the hunter goes to sleep with the child in his arms, and his head pillow'd in the shaggy mane of the lion.

Neil, of course, was the hunter, Castor the protecting lion, the child a dummy, while the other characters were taken by the various members of the company, the march at the beginning of the little play being particularly good.

Neil was careful to have his whip constantly in readiness, and the fight with the three lions was more of a fight than many imagined.

More than once the animals were about "to cut up rough," as Neil called it, and he used his whip and his eyes pretty freely in enforcing strict obedience.

At last the thing was over, a little curtain was let down, and the lions sent to their cages, after which the performance proceeded.

Edna was riding, when suddenly a noise was heard in the region of the dressing-room.

The young equestrienne continued the performance, so as not to create an excitement, but Neil, knowing that something was wrong, ran in the direction of the sound.

"What is it?" he asked of one of the canvas men.

"Hyena got mad, threatening to break out, bouncing against the cage like the devil, bust it in a minute!"

"Got a hot iron?"

"Yes, the one the 'Fire King' uses."

"Bring it to me, and hurry up."

Neil soon reached the cage of the hyena, and found the animal in a terrible rage.

There was a great danger of his breaking from his confinement, the cage being not over strong.

The brute had one of its paws outside, and was trying to wrench the bars loose, at the same time uttering a horrible roar.

Neil struck the paw a cut with his whip, and the animal withdrew it.

With another howl he dashed against the side of the cage, which could not stand such treatment long.

If he got out there would be a panic, and the excitement might extend to the other animals.

As the fierce brute made a final dash at the bars, Neil struck him several blows over the face.

He retreated, and was about to make another spring, which would have settled the business, when the canvas-man ran up.

In his hand he held a long bar of iron, red hot, and protected on the cool end by a heavy piece of felt.

Neil seized this weapon with both hands and thrust it into the cage as the hyena rushed forward.

A few rapid blows with this formidable weapon reduced the beast to submission, and he soon afterward was transferred to a safer cage without any trouble.

Thus had Neil's coolness again prevented a shocking catastrophe.

CHAPTER IX.

NEIL IS MADE A PRISONER AND SERVES A FRIEND A SCURVY TRICK.

THREE men sat in one of the side-show booths a few minutes previous to the conclusion of the performance that same evening.

As it was the last night in town, the tents would be struck while the audience was dismissing, and the packing up be commenced immediately.

The booth had been dismantled of its attractions and would soon be pulled down, but the men appear to have nearly finished their conversation, by what follows.

"You will be sure and get him into the carriage?" says a seedy-looking man with a sinister expression, whom we can easily recognize as Robbins.

"You're right," says another of the group, a man dressed as a hack-driver. "I've got rid of his own man what always takes him home, and he won't never suspect anything, but'll get right in as clever as a mouse."

"You'll drive him to my place?" said the third man.

"You bet, and if you fellows will wait for me and be on hand when I drive up, we won't have no trouble."

"You can rely on us," grunted Robbins. "I don't fancy having that kid living to bother me and do me out of a fortune."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the driver.

"Confound him! I tried to get rid of him on the steamer, but it was no use, and now I daren't go near that lion of his; he knows me and would kill me if he got a chance."

"Them lions will be in want of a trainer to-morrow," laughed the other man, who was one of the canvas-men, a fellow named Jake Burns, whom Robbins had bribed to do his bidding.

Neil was, of course, the person to be abducted, and the driver was to take him to a place where Jake was well acquainted, and there to be disposed of as Robbins deemed fit.

The plan was well contrived and promised to work well; whether it did or not we shall see.

When Neil had finished dressing, after the show, he packed his ring costumes in a small valise and came out to look for his carriage as usual.

There was but one vehicle in waiting, and calling out to the driver, he asked if he had come to take him home.

"Yes, sir, I'm your man," answered the fellow on the box. "Jump right in, sir; I'll leave you there in a jiffy."

Neil entered, sat down, and slammed the door, when the carriage drove off at a rattling pace.

Neil was so busy with his thoughts that he did not notice whether the man was driving, the night being dark, but after a while he began to think that they ought to have reached the hotel by that time.

He looked out of the carriage windows and saw that they were driving along a country road, with no lights visible, and but few houses.

"This can't be the right road. The man must have made a mistake," said Neil. "I don't remember this road at all."

He looked again and saw that they were now entering a narrow lane shaded by trees.

"By Jove!" muttered Neil, "I see it all. This is another plot of that villain, that scoundrel of a detective whom I saw hob-nobbing with old Robbins—he villain!"

Once this thought crossed his mind, he set about making his escape.

He did not know the way back, but that did not matter; the villains should not carry him off if he knew it.

He intended to leave the carriage at once, and make his way back on foot.

He tried the right hand door first.

It was securely fastened!

The villains had evidently foreseen that he might try to escape.

Then he tried the left hand door, the one by which he had entered.

The knob turned easily, and the door swung open.

Ah-ha! then escape was at hand, after all.

He sprang out, heading the same way the carriage was going.

As he reached the ground the driver reined up his horses.

He started to run, but on the instant was seized and blindfolded, despite his resistance.

He was quickly pinioned and dragged into a house by two men, his

cries being smothered and his struggles rendered abortive by the strong grasp of his captors.

The driver jumped from the box and went to the assistance of Robbins and Jake.

Between the three Neil was powerless, and despite his resistance was carried to an upper room and locked in, the bandage over his mouth and eyes being then removed.

He found himself in a small, scantily-furnished apartment, having two windows, through which the only light the place afforded entered.

The door was locked on the outside, and probably guarded, as Neil heard a man walking up and down in the hall, evidently for the purpose of preventing his getting out.

"This is a nice mess," thought our hero. "I'd like to know who these fellows are. There were three, including the driver; the other two must be Robbins and this fellow Crowell. I'd like to have a talking to them for about five minutes."

He took a survey of his apartments, for the purpose of ascertaining what might be his chance of escape.

From the windows he could see the street below him, at too great a height to admit of his jumping, so that plan had to be abandoned.

The trees did not extend any of their branches near enough to his windows to make them of any use in climbing out, though he could see that they swept close against the next house.

After deliberating a moment, he thought that perhaps he could crawl along to the next house, and so get from it into the trees.

He raised the window nearest it, and looked out.

One glance showed him that that plan also would have to be given up.

There were no ledges upon which he might gain a footing, the window frames being flush with the clap-boards.

He had thought that by standing with one foot on each window ledge, he could cross the gap between the windows, one at a time, and so reach the trees.

Besides the absence of ledges on which to rest his feet, the distance between the window and the next was too great for him to span, even had there been room enough to stand while making the attempt.

"It seems to be no go," he murmured; "so I suppose I shall have to await developments. Wonder what these fellows intend to do with me?"

He closed the window, and sat down in one of the shabby chairs, listening to the monotonous walk of the man outside, and wondering which one of the villains it was.

Placing his eye to the keyhole, he looked into the hall, which was light enough for him to distinguish the form but not the face of the solitary sentinel.

"I say," whispered Neil, "you fellow outside there."

"What do you wan'?" growled the man.

Neil thought there was a familiar sound in that voice.

It was not Robbins, he was sure of that. But who, then, was it?

"What will you take to let me out of here?" said Neil.

"Hist! Wait a few minutes until those fellows below there are drunk enough, and I'll let you out for nothing."

Now he knew the voice sure enough, and was astonished that he had not done so before.

The man outside was Crowell, the detective.

This was another proof that he was in league with Robbins.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Busybody, after all?" said Neil. "I don't wonder at your being in such bad company."

"No—no; you wrong me," said the man, hastily. "I drove you here, it is true, but that was in order that I might save you. I want to talk to you on important business."

"That's too thin," sneered Neil. "Didn't I see you talking with old Robbins in Sacramento? I know what his dodge is well enough, and I'll put the police on his track as soon as I get out of this."

"I tell you I have come to help you out."

"Prove it, then, and don't stand there talking like a fool."

"Wait a moment."

Neil heard the man go down-stairs cautiously, and after an absence of about five minutes, saw him return.

"They are both drunk as lords with the stuff I gave 'em," said Crowell. "I've got the keys, and now I'll let you out."

He was as good as his word, for in a moment the door was open.

Neil, never doubting but that he meant to do some act of treachery, rushed upon the man, tripped up his heels, dashed down-stairs, threw

open the door, and was soon bowling down the road toward the city at a good five-mile gait.

CHAPTER X.

ADAMS SENIOR GIVES CROWELL A SETBACK.

Our readers must not blame Neil for his treatment of Crowell, considering that he believed the man to be his enemy, and an accomplice of Robbins.

Appearances were certainly against him, as Neil had seen him go off with the man who had more than once attempted his life.

How was he to know that Crowell was trying to pump Robbins in regard to his (Neil's) previous history, or that he meant well instead of ill toward him?

It was certainly unfortunate for all concerned that matters had turned out in such a way, for Neil now regarded the man with more suspicion than ever, and for Crowell to try and explain the situation would have been useless.

Neil was resolved not only not to have anything to say to the man, but to have him arrested if he dared to show his face again where he was.

All these things flashed through his mind as he sped down the road, presently hearing the sound of wheels behind him.

He doubted not that the man was in pursuit of him, and he increased his speed, resolving not to be retaken.

It was indeed Crowell, who had taken the place of the coachman hired by the villains, and had all the while meant to rescue Neil, who was now following.

He had seemed to be acting against Neil at the first, because he wanted to get an opportunity to talk to him, and really settle in his mind whether the lad was the lost son of old Wentworth or not.

He believed that he was, and felt assured that a few minutes' conversation would settle the matter.

We do not say that it would, but that Crowell thought so, and Neil's perversity seemed to prevent such a conversation taking place.

Crowell had picked himself up as soon as he was able, being somewhat stunned, though not badly hurt, and immediately made his way down below, where he unhitched his horse, jumped on the box, and rattled away after Neil, resolving to overtake him at all hazards.

Neil was just as determined not to be overtaken, and fearing that he would be, dodged up an alley-way between two houses, bounced over half-a-dozen fences, waking up as many dogs and setting them to howling, and at last reached a back street, which he followed until he came to a stop against a wall.

He had eluded the pursuit of the detective, however, and that was all he wanted, and no amount of walls could have disheartened him.

He made his way, somehow or another, back to the main street, and after an hour's hard traveling, came upon the circus men engaged in the last preparations for departure.

He rode to the hotel and went to his room, where he found that the valise, which he had left in the carriage, had arrived before him, the clerk saying that a hackman had brought it.

Neil was very much astonished at this piece of information, but more so upon beholding a note addressed to "Young Grizzly Adams," tucked in between the handles.

He opened it, saw that it was signed "Crowell," and, without reading it, stuck it in the flame of the lamp, and when it was nearly consumed, threw it out of the window.

If, instead of doing this, he had read the note, he would have been saved much anxiety; but prejudiced as he was against Crowell, we cannot blame him for acting as he did.

The next day, early in the morning, the show took its departure, and Neil did not see his enemies.

The fact was, Robbins and the other man were still sound asleep from the drugged liquor which Crowell had given them, and of which they drank copiously.

When they awoke at noon they were dazed, and did not think of their prisoner at first, and finally, when they recollect him, they discovered him to have flown.

They could not make it out at all, and Robbins swore to get ev-

with the coach driver, for he it must have been, he thought, who released the young wild beast tamer.

He accosted the man whom he had engaged to do the work, but whom Crowell had also made drunk and then stolen his pack, and began abusing him roundly.

The man could remember nothing except that he was to have done something, and when Robbins accused him of having released the prisoner he had not the least doubt but that he had done so and forgotten all about it.

"You must 'scuse me, Misser Robbins; but I didn't feel well last night, kind o' sick, you know; ain't got over it yet. Sorry it happened. Won' do so 'gin, s'help me," muttered the man, still under the influence of liquor.

Robbins raved and stormed, and finally belabored the man soundly, at which the latter, getting mad, turned to and gave Robbins such a beating in return that he was glad to make his escape with a black eye and a badly contused nose.

A week afterward Neil was in Utah, on the line of the Pacific railroad, exciting the greatest enthusiasm and making friends everywhere he went.

He received several letters from Crowell, but returned every one of them unopened, having recognized the handwriting.

One evening after the show, Adams, the clown, was sitting alone smoking a pipe, when a stranger came up to him.

He talked upon general topics for a while, and the veteran clown found him to be a well informed, intelligent gentleman, able to converse upon almost every subject.

"You have a son in the business, I understand," said the stranger, at length; "a young lion tamer. Rather perilous, is it not?"

"Oh, no, the lad knows what he is about. There's nothing like having the brutes understand the difference between intelligence and instinct."

"He inherits his powers, then, does he?"

"Oh, yes; it's been in the family for generations."

"But you are not a beast tamer?"

"Well, no; not exactly. I have tamed several human brutes in my day, though, and they are about as bad as any."

"How did you go to work?"

"Showed them the superiority of my biceps over theirs, hit strongest out from the shoulder, demonstrated the advisability of knowing how to use the left hand, and all that."

"Aha! I perceive you are somewhat of a wag."

"Somewhat is good, considering that it is my business. You are no flatterer, I should judge."

"And this boy is your own son?"

"Certainly; isn't his name Adams?"

"You might have adopted him."

"So I might."

"May I ask if you did so?"

"You may."

The stranger looked puzzled, and finally said, with a laugh:

"Then I do ask it."

"And I shall not answer. The boy is mine, and no one shall get him away from me as long as I live."

"Excuse me, sir; I am not in the profession, and do not wish to steal your son's services."

"You'd better not."

"I have an idea that he is the heir to a great fortune, and I wish to know whether he is or is not your own son, by birth, not by adoption."

"What is your name?"

"Crowell."

"That is sufficient," replied Adams, arising. "I have heard of you before, and let me tell you that if you bother either me or my son again with your infernal nonsense, I'll chuck you into the horse pond. A hint's as good as a kick, so remember that. Good-night."

CHAPTER XI.

NEIL AGAIN IN THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMIES—A FRIGHTFUL FATE IN STORE.

"CURSE my stupidity!" muttered the detective; "why didn't I give him another name? I might have known that the youngster had told this fellow all about me, and now he's got the same suspicions. I ought to be kicked for being so blind, just when I was getting along so 'sely, too."

Thus communing with himself he walked away, trying to devise some plan of communicating with Neil, finally coming to the conclusion that he had better send for old Wentworth, and have him see the boy in person.

Having reached this point, he was suddenly aroused from his reverie by hearing the noise of a struggle ahead of him.

He darted forward just in time to see three men overpower a lad of about eighteen years, short, but well built, and drag him away.

He recognized Neil in an instant.

The men were abducting him.

"Halloo, there; stop, or I'll fire!" he shouted, drawing his revolver.

Then, recalling that he might hit the young man instead of the abductors, he did not fire, but bounded after them in hot pursuit.

All of a sudden a man sprang out from behind a rock, and Crowell, being unable to stop, fell over him, and rolled ignominiously in the dust.

In another moment the man was sitting astride of him, and holding a pistol to his head.

"You just keep quiet, now, or I'll let out some of your surplus brains!"

"Who are you?"

"Never mind. I want you to keep mum. I ain't going to hurt you, if you lie still until I tell you you can go. It won't be long."

In the meantime, who were Neil's abductors, and what were their plans?

One was Robbins, who had followed the lad up, fully determined to get rid of him this time without fail.

Another was Jake, the canvas man, and the third was a wretch whom the others had hired to assist them.

He it was who had sat upon Crowell, and was now guarding him so securely.

It will seem strange that Neil made no outcry or called for help.

The fact of the matter was that Robbins had first struck him a severe blow upon the head and then chloroformed him, thus rendering him perfectly unconscious to all that was going on.

The two villains carried the limp body of the lad between them, and hurried on in the direction of the circus tent.

What could they be going to do with him?

"We'll feed him to his own lions!" said Jake.

Horrible thought!

"Nonsense!" retorted Robbins; "they wouldn't touch him. You ought to know that."

"What then?"

"You know the den of poisonous snakes, rattlers, boas, cobras, and all that?"

"You bet I do! I'm always afraid of my life to go near it."

"We'll chuck him in there!"

"My God, they'll kill him!" said Jake, almost dropping the body.

"I know that well enough, and that's just what I mean they shall do. Curse him! Once he's out of the way I shall be good for something."

The circus tent was by this time nearly deserted, the few watchmen being all that remained about the place.

Jake knew where the cage containing the serpents was, and he made his way thither, carefully watching the sentinels to see that none observed him.

Crouching along in the shadow, dropping flat upon the ground whenever the watchman happened to be passing, and scarcely daring to draw breath, the two scoundrels made their way along until they came to where the cage was.

Neil was still unconscious, Robbins taking good care that he should remain so, although they dragged him over the rough ground as though he had been a log.

At last they reached the right place, and Jake crawled under the canvas, dragging Neil after him, and followed by Robbins.

The cage of the serpents was right at hand, and behind several others, so that the villains could work without interruption.

There was a dim light in the place, but not enough to enable any one to distinguish them at any distance.

The den of the snakes was entered by an opening in the top instead of at the sides, like most of the cages, and the villains would have to climb up.

There was no danger of their being seen, however.

Jake stepped upon the wheels of the wagon, mounted to the top, and then dragged Neil after him.

Robbins followed, and then both men set about opening the cage.

"Once in there," said the old scoundrel, "he won't know anything until he feels them stinging him, and hears them hissing all around him."

"He'll find 'em worse than lions to manage," muttered Jake.

The slight noise they made in opening the door at the top had already aroused the snakes, and they began to hiss and squirm in a frightful manner.

"Now, then!" said Jake, and he threw back a section of the top.

The snakes were now thoroughly aroused, and were thrashing about in a way to give one the horrors, their glittering folds catching the light, and showing a dozen different colors.

The villains kneeled, one on either side of the opening, and held the inanimate body of the poor boy between them, ready to drop it among the writhing monsters.

What a fate for a human being!

To be stung to death by poisonous serpents, and no one at hand to aid!

Verily, the men who would consign a youth to such a fate must be fiends indeed.

The snakes are wriggling and hissing, thrusting their sinuous bodies up toward the opening, and darting angry glances from their glittering eyes upon the intruders.

Their forked tongues dart rapidly in and out, and already one can imagine the poison coursing through the poor victim's veins.

"Now, then!" says Robbins.

They hold the body over the opening, drop it into the cage, slam down the top, and jumping to the ground, dart away in the darkness, leaving the poor lad to a horrible fate.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW TWO OF THE CONSPIRATORS WERE SERVED OUT.

As Neil struck the floor of the cage containing the serpents, and the villains ran away, one of the monsters struck his fangs into the boy's leg.

The cut caused him to open his eyes.

He was surrounded by hissing pythons.

He will be stung to death!

Not so.

The wretches had overlooked one vital point.

What was that?

Not one of the monsters could harm him with their bite, as all the virus had long since been extracted.

This they either did not know or had forgotten.

Neil was perfectly well aware of it, however, and knew that they could not hurt him.

There was danger that some of the largest might crush him in their powerful folds, though, and therefore the best thing to do was to get out at once.

Scrambling to his feet, the plucky lad struck down the foremost, and making a leap for the top of the cage, threw open the doors, which had been shut down, but not fastened.

He was partly out, and was pulling himself up, when he felt his right foot seized by one of the snakes, and knew that he would be drawn down unless help arrived.

He shouted to the watchman, at the same time holding on with all his might to prevent being pulled back into the cage.

The man heard him, although in a distant part of the tent, and soon ran to his assistance, being very much surprised to find him in such a predicament.

"How ever did you get in there, Master Neil?" was his first question.

"Never mind that," said Neil; "give that fellow a rap first, and I'll tell you how it happened afterwards. The muscular fellow is pulling my foot off."

The man seized a stick that was lying near, and gave the serpent such a poke that he was glad to release Neil and attack his new enemy.

The boy quickly drew himself out of his uncomfortable position, and, shutting the cage, scrambled down to the ground, his foot paining him considerably.

Taking off his shoe, he bathed the aching member in cold water, and soon allayed the pain caused by the unusual tension of the muscles, being able in a short time to walk to the hotel.

He told the man how he supposed the thing had happened and whom he suspected, warning him to look out for Robbins, whom he described.

"I know him," replied the man. "He has been hanging about the show, off and on, ever since we left 'Frisco. If I catch him around here again I'll give him a dose of whiplash that he won't forget in a hurry, I can tell you. The ugly rascal, he ought to be taught better manners!"

Neil told Adams the next day about his escape, and the old clown was virtuously indignant.

"They meant bad enough, even if they knew that the snakes couldn't bite you, and we'll give 'em a warning. How many were there?"

"That I can't tell, but there must have been at least three of them. There always have been that number before."

"Well, you just keep your eye peeled, and if you suspect anybody, let me know."

"I will!"

It was in the forenoon and Neil was walking about the circus grounds, when he suddenly came upon Jake, the canvas man, carrying a pail of water.

The scoundrel had not heard of Neil's escape, Adams having caused it to be noised around that someone had been badly bitten by the serpents and was not expected to live.

Consequently, when he saw Neil, he was filled with terror, fancying in his superstitious ignorance, that he saw a ghost.

His eyes dilated with horror, his tongue protruded, his jaws dropped, his cheeks turned an ashen hue, his knees gave out beneath him, and letting the pail of water fall to the ground, he gasped, in stammering tones:

"Oh, Lord! It's a g-g-ghost, a sp-p-p-pook! The snakes have b-bitten him to death—and he's come—b-back to—to—to life again! Oh, Lord!"

He fell to the ground in a fit, and rolled over and over in his agony, tearing his clothes and begrimed himself with dust.

Some of the men hearing the noise ran up, Adams among the number.

"There's one of the fellows," said Neil.

"Give him a dose!" shouted Adams, and catching a pail of water from one of the men's hands, he soused Jake from head to foot.

"Give me another!" he yelled. "We'll bring him out of his fit first and give him fits afterward."

A second and a third pailful were thrown over the man, who finally scrambled to his feet thoroughly drenched and recovered from his fit.

He had hardly time to gasp an appeal for mercy when two more pailfuls were thrown over him, taking him clear off his feet and knocking the breath out of his body.

"Stop—stop!" he yelled, when he found his voice. "That's enough—I'm all right now," for he saw half-a-dozen men just ready to douse him again.

"Did you drop Neil into the den of the snakes?" asked the clown.

"Ye-es, but I won't do it ag'in!"

"No, I don't believe you will," replied Adams; "let him have it, boys!"

The boys did let him have it in good earnest, and a more demoralized, bedraggled, wet-through, mud-bespattered, disreputable-looking wretch had never been seen since the days when the last man on earth shouted out: "Go ahead with your old ark, it's only a little shower!"

"Oh, Lord—oh, Lord, don't give me any more!" whined Jake. "I've got all I want—I won't do it again, so help me!"

"Who were the other fellows?"

"I dunno, 'pon my word I don't! Oh, Heaven, let me go," for one of the men had seized him by the collar with one hand and held a "black snake" whip in the other.

"Tell us who the other sellers were, or we'll give you a warming to counteract the effect of the ducking," said Adams.

"No—no! I dunno who they was, 'pon my word I----ow—ow—ow!"

The last remarks were brought out by the whip which played around his shanks and flanks in a particularly spiteful manner.

"I'll know who they were, or I'll take the hide off you," said the man with the whip, proceeding to carry out his threat literally.

"Ow—ow—ow! It was Robbins!" yelled the dancing wretch, trying in vain to escape the well-merited castigation, "and the other was Bill, big Bill, the tent man, ow—ow!"

"That's all right," said Adams, "let him go, Tom! Now get out!" he added, enforcing his command by a vigorous kick in the rear which made the man think he had been struck by lightning.

At this juncture Mr. Hooker appeared.

"What's the matter here?" he said.

Adams told him.

"Served him right, too," said Hooker. "See here, you," he said to Jake, "you just travel as fast as you can, and if I ever catch you around my show again, you'll wish you'd never been born! Go to the cashier and get what's coming to you, and clear out!"

His remarks were further enforced by a kick which made Jake disgusted with all things mundane, and long to go to perdition, where he was sure he would have a better time.

He got his money, packed up his clothes, and "lit out" of that town about as quick as the first train could carry him; and it didn't go half fast enough, for all the small boys in town had heard of the affair, and were at the station in full force, stretching along a mile or so beyond, to hoot at him as he made his exit.

Then Bill was found, and when he had confessed to his share in the undertaking he was dragged through a duck pond, laid out to dry on a threshing-floor and hammered till he thought every bone in his body would be broken; kicked, mauled, punched, pelted at with stones, decayed vegetables, rotten eggs, resurrected felines and puppies that had come to an untimely end in a water-butt, and run out of the town by the aforesaid small boys, bestriding a particularly sharp-cornered, most uncompromisingly rough rail, and accompanied by a perfect pandemonium of sound.

Most likely if Robbins had been found he would have fared as badly as any of the others; but he had fled in the early morning, having discovered, quite accidentally, that Neil was alive and well.

He fully understood what would be his fate if caught, and, therefore, taking counsel with no one, he departed speedily, and, for a time, escaped the punishment he so richly deserved.

"So Crowell did not have anything to do with this last affair after all," said Neil. "It is well he did not, but I can promise him that if he bothers me any more with his old woman stories he won't get off so well."

Crowell did not show up, however, and in the course of a couple of months Neil had very nearly forgotten all about him.

They had arrived in one of the largest Kansas towns, when what was Neil's surprise to see, sitting in the hotel parlor, no less a person than old Wentworth in conversation with a man he did not know.

"I'll bet a dollar that that's the detective in disguise," he muttered. "I'll put up a job on him, see if I don't."

CHAPTER XIII.

NEIL PREVENTS A CATASTROPHE AND PLAYS A TRICK.

"Pop," said Neil, to the old clown, in the afternoon, as they were dressing for the ring. "Pop," he always called the man his father, though he knew he was not, "that old gentleman is here, and the detective."

"I know the old man is, but I didn't see the other one."

"Now, I'll tell you what we'll do," said Neil, buckling his sandals.

"I don't want to hurt the old gentleman, because he's never done me any harm; the other fellow has, and I want to give him a dose."

"Well, old fellow, how are you going to do it?" asked Adams, reddening his lips, and putting a dash of scarlet on one cheek.

"I want you to talk with the man, treat him decently, you know, make him think you mean to tell him all he wants to find out, and then send him up to my room."

"You don't mean to see him?"

"No," answered Neil, putting the last dash of rouge on his cheeks,

and tossing back his dark, wavy locks. "I'll fix him, though, that's all; leave it to me."

With that he left the dressing room to go to his lions, Adams finishing his own preparations, and then joining the other clowns who were laughing and joking in the green-room.

When Neil came on with his four lions there was the usual burst of applause, and he began putting them through their performance, just as he had done many times before, looking only at them, and not noticing particularly who was in the audience.

Suddenly he heard Castor growl and saw him preparing to spring, not over his head, for he was resting on one knee with his arms folded, ready for that part of the performance, but toward a point in the ring far to the right.

His eyes darted over the throng in an instant, and he saw a man just sitting down in the fourth or fifth row of the reserved seats.

The man was Robbins!

Castor had seen him, remembered him, and was about to fly at him in his rage.

Neil sprang up in a moment.

"Down, boy, down!" he said, in a whisper, brandishing his whip.

The beast paused for an instant, but then gathering himself once more for the effort, prepared to make the leap, his eye fixed steadily upon the object of his hate.

"Down—down, I say!" cried Neil.

The brute did not obey, and in another instant he would have been flying through the air.

Neil sprang in front of him, and gave him a terrible cut across the face, speaking more sternly than he had ever done, and looking the animal straight in the eye.

"Not now, I tell you—not now!" he said, firmly. "Lie down, sir!"

Castor crunched lower than before and glared savagely at the boy, as if he would be revenged upon him for cheating him of his victim.

Neil returned the glance fiercely, and stamping his sandaled foot rushed upon the brute, and seizing his shaggy mane with one hand, showered a succession of blows upon the lion's head.

"Down, I say! I am master here!" he said, in low but imperative tones, and at last the brute gave a low whine and stretched himself out upon the ground.

Then turning his gaze toward Robbins, who still sat in the audience, pale and trembling, Neil said to him:

"I would advise the person who has aroused the anger of my pet to keep out of his sight hereafter. Castor never forgets an enemy!"

The lion looked up at this speech and growled, although he did not offer to change his position.

Neil had, since Castor had grown quiet, kept his eyes on the other lions so that they should not do anything out of the way, and although they appeared restless, they nevertheless behaved themselves.

He then went through the rest of the act, not omitting anything, not even the putting his head in the lions' mouths.

This showed the people what wonderful control he had over the brutes, and when they ran off and entered their cage, the applause was simply deafening.

Neil bowed upon all sides, but as he looked toward where the villain sat, he saw that the latter had left.

It was well for him that he had, as Neil intended to have had him arrested as soon as he could have reached the outside, and given orders to an officer.

"So, Mr. Robbins, you've turned up again, have you?" thought Neil. "I would just like to know what your little game is, and why you want to get rid of me."

In the afternoon, between the two performances, as Adams was sitting on the hotel steps, he saw the man whom Neil had pointed out to him approaching.

He looked around and saw Neil just disappearing behind the house. The boy nodded to him, and by that time the man had come up.

"May I trouble you for a light, if you please?" he said, for Adams was smoking, and he had an unlit cigar in his hand.

The cigar was lighted, and then the stranger began entering into conversation, talking upon different things, and finally upon the circus itself.

The man, whom we might as well say was Crowell, to avoid needless mystification, praised the performance, and particularly Neil's part of it.

"He seems to be the youngest performer you have," said the

man. "I am not mistaken, am I—you are one of the performers?"

"Yes, I'm the fellow that makes you laugh to order. Strange business, mine."

"I must say, sir, that you succeed most admirably in pleasing your audiences; I thought I remembered your face, despite the absence of powder and paint. You have none of the so-called baby performers with you?"

"No; I don't believe in putting such little fellows into the business. My boy was eleven or twelve before he went in."

"But they do have them as young as four or five."

"Yes, though they generally run the age down from two to five years. My boy is eighteen and over, but on the bills they call him scarcely fifteen, and that's the way it goes. Why, some of the women never get beyond twenty-five years. It's astonishing."

"They don't die so soon, do they?"

"No, they don't dye quite as soon as that, though when they reach thirty and forty and forty-five they dye and enamel and everything else, so as to keep at twenty-five."

"Oh, I catch your drift. I presume that a good many stolen children, or lost, perhaps, would be a better word, could be found in the circus."

"Yes, their parents neglect them, some of our people find them abandoned and bring them up as their own; they get attached to the life and finally enter it; or, sometimes, a real likely boy is stolen and put to the business until he forgets his folks, and then, having no other place, stays with the show."

"What made me speak of the matter," continued Crowell, "is the fact that a friend of mine lost a child—a bright boy, some years ago."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and he has an idea that he was either stolen and brought to the circus people, or perhaps found by them, as you say, and educated to the business."

"But why in that more than any other?"

"Because the father of the boy has seen him in the ring, or at least, thinks he has, and I am interested in the matter, and thought you might be able to give me some information."

"I will assist you, sir, if possible."

"You may be surprised to learn, sir, that the person my friend recognizes as his son is one of your performers."

"Not me, I suppose?" asked Adams, with a laugh.

"Oh, no, sir; not you, but the young lion-tamer, Young Grizzly Adams."

"My boy Neil? Impossible!"

"Not at all, sir—not at all; excuse my anxiety and perhaps impertinence, but is he your son?"

"You can go and ask him if you don't believe me. You'll find him in his room at the present moment."

"You have no objection to my seeing him?"

"None at all."

"Nor to my asking him any question I see fit?"

"Not if he doesn't mind."

"And take my friend to see him?"

"Well, I guess you'd better go alone, first," said Adams, remembering what Will had said about not wanting to bother the old gentleman. "It may prove unnecessary to say anything to your friend about it."

"Think so?"

"Yes."

"What number did you say his room was?"

"I didn't say."

"Ah, you are fond of a joke, I see."

"Yes, deucedly! I am thinking of one now."

"Pray tell it to me."

"Wait till you come back. You will find Master Neil Rice Adams in room No. 17, first flight up, on your right. He will probably give you a warm reception, though I am afraid you will get nothing out of him. Walk right in."

"I can at least try," answered Crowell, and off he went, running quickly up the stairs in his excitement.

Number Seventeen was close at hand, and as the door stood partly open, Crowell, remembering Adams' injunction to walk right in, pushed it open wide in his excitement and stepped forward.

The moment he did so he gave a gasp as a perfect shower of water fell upon him, deluging him from head to foot.

There was no one in the room, and he had leisure to examine the premises.

A pail of water had been suspended over the door, which connected with a rod, so that when it was opened it tripped the pail and spilled the water.

This simple college trick had been played upon the unsuspecting detective by Neil, who, from an adjoining room, had witnessed the whole affair.

Crowell went away looking very much disgusted and realizing the joke that had been played upon him, while Neil burst into a fit of laughing that made him turn white in the face.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW PERFORMER—FRIENDS WITH NEIL—MYSTERIES.

The show only remained one night in this place, and Neil was away the first thing the next morning, seeing nothing more of the man he had given a ducking nor of the evil-minded Robbins.

Adams had a good laugh when Neil told him of the trick he had played upon Crowell, and said that he guessed the man would not trouble them any more, and that they were safe from any further annoyance.

In the next town a lad of about the same age as Neil applied for a position in the company.

"What can you do?" asked Hooker, Neil, Adams and others being present at the time.

"Trapeze business, vaulting, tumbling and juggling."

"Been in the business before?"

"Not professionally; I never could get a chance."

Neil liked the looks of the lad very much, and hoped that he would be given a chance, as there were none of his own age in the company, and he wanted a companion.

"Ask Hooker to give him a show, pop," he whispered to Adams.

"Give him a trial, I look," the clown spoke up immediately. "I believe in encouraging youthful talent. If he's any good, I'll engage him so as to be company for Neil."

"Oh, if you only would," said the lad, "I should be so glad. I have no money, no friends—nothing! It is hard work to get along, and I'm so lonesome without any friends."

This was said with a simple pathos that was absolutely touching, and produced a strong impression in his favor.

Going to Neil he took the boy's hand, and gazing earnestly into his face, said, manfully, and yet pitifully:

"I know I shall like you, and I trust you will like me. Won't you ask them to take me?"

"What is your name?"

"Adrian Laurens, but they always call me Ad."

"Well, Ad, we will have to see what you can do first," said Neil, who liked the boy's manners very much.

He was darker than Neil, his complexion being almost olive in hue, and had jet black eyes, shaded by the most beautiful lashes in the world.

His mouth was small, and his lips, of an exquisite curve, were as red as cherries, his teeth being white and shapely.

Altogether he was a youthful Adonis, and in point of good looks would be apt to prove a formidable rival to Neil himself.

Of this, however, the latter thought nothing, and liking the boy, determined, if he was good for anything, to have him in the company.

"Will you take him if he is a good performer?" asked Neil.

"Yes," said Hooker, who was ready to do anything the young lion-tamer wanted, so as to be on the right side and retain him in his company.

"Have you any costumes with you?" asked Neil of his companion.

"Oh, yes, for I was bound to keep them if I lost everything else. It's a hard thing for a poor boy, without father or mother, to get along nowadays."

The party retired to the ring, where Adrian opened a little hand valise he carried, and took out a complete suit of fleshings, tights and shirt, black velvet trunks, trimmed with very heavy gold lace, a

jaunty cap with a gold tassel, and lastly a pair of shoes, of the kind usually worn by acrobats and trapezists.

He then ran into Neil's dressing room, the boy going with him, and donned his costume, while the men were rigging the trapeze bars.

"You are too dark to wear black," said Neil; "you ought to have red or white."

"I know it," answered Ad, naively, "but taste is not always accompanied with a long purse. These cost less and that is why I took them."

The boy was slighter than Neil, and a few inches taller, but his figure was well proportioned and showed good training.

The two boys stepped into the ring, and then Ad gave a really good exhibition of ordinary trapeze business.

Then he performed a feat that was new, and fairly surprised the old stagers.

Securing the swing so that it could not move, making a horizontal bar of it, in fact, he performed the giant swing, first with his hands and then with his feet on the bar.

This was all very well, but now came the surprising part of all.

Taking two broad, well-oiled straps, he doubled them and bound each with a wire close to the bar, fastening the two ends of each by buckles, having first attached a ring.

These rings he held in his hands and then performed the giant swing again, having no hold upon the bar save by the straps.

Suddenly changing his position he put his feet into the rings, and swung over and over several times, letting go at last and catching a second bar which swung not far away.

"By Jove, that's first-class," said Hooker. "Do that and not be able to get an engagement! The managers must've been cursed fools."

"They said they were all full, sir, and couldn't promise me an engagement until next season."

"They won't get you next season, I can tell 'em that."

"Would you like to see me do a flying trapeze act?"

"Yes, certainly."

The swings were arranged, Ad himself superintending the work, and then after taking a short rest he performed the triple trapeze business very gracefully, seeming to be as much at his ease while flying about in mid air, as while standing on solid ground.

Everybody was pleased with his performance, and an agreement was then and there entered into, whereby his services were at the disposal of Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum for the remainder of that season, and the refusal of the next.

Adams thought that the boy was remarkably proficient for an amateur, and had a shrewd suspicion that he was a professional; but at any rate he was a good card and Neil liked him, so that was reason enough for engaging him.

He did not perform the next day, which was Saturday, and in the meantime some new and elegant costumes were made for him, which became him wonderfully.

On the Monday following he made his first public appearance, and divided the applause between Neil and Edna.

The latter became his friend, because Neil was, and treated him with the utmost cordiality, the three becoming boon companions at once.

The lions regarded Ad with favor, because Neil liked him, and on account of his manly bearing, and he used often to pat their tawny heads and give them little dainties which he knew they were fond of.

He grew more fond of Neil every day, and often acted upon the latter's suggestions in inventing new and difficult acts.

Both boys being waifs, that fact seemed to bind them more closely together, and Neil confided to Ad his whole history, particularly concerning old Wentworth, Ad giving his own history in turn, which was quite interesting.

One night, after everybody had retired, Ad heard a signal at his window, and quickly dressing, he crept down-stairs and went out.

He was met by a man in a long cloak.

"Have you learned anything?" he asked. "Is the clown his father?"

"No; and he doesn't know who he is. There are no marks on him or his clothing--no means of identification."

"That is good. Did the clown tell you about the old man's telling him of any marks?"

"No; but Crowell was here to-day, and tried to pump me about

Neil, and told me about the marks on the clothing, 'N. W.,' that's all, worked in silk."

"You have not seen the old man?"

"No, not yet."

"That's right; don't do so for some time yet; we'll fix it in good shape and make a pile of money out of it. You'll keep your word?"

"To be sure. 'Tis the best chance I ever had to make money."

"You bet--will see you to-morrow."

"Very well, good-night," and Ad slipped up-stairs, and throwing off his clothes, jumped into bed.

"I declare," he said to himself, "I hate to do this sort of thing. Suppose he should be the right one, after all? I would be cheating him out of his money, and after he has been so kind to me; no--no, I can't do it until I know more."

The next day he saw Crowell again, and while he told him nothing concerning Neil, learned the whole story of the loss of Wentworth's son, supposed to have been stolen by a vengeful nurse.

Crowell seemed satisfied that Neil was not the one, and told Wentworth so, the old man having followed, but never being able to see Neil, except in the ring.

Ad seemed distressed at something that night, and Neil tried to gain his confidence, but the boy turned pale and begged Neil not to press him, and finally he ran out doors in the night.

He came at once upon a woman, who asked him if he would come to the help of a friend of hers, who could not live until morning, and who wished to confess a crime.

With a strange feeling at his heart Ad consented, and followed the woman.

CHAPTER XV.

AD HEARS A CONFESSION AND MAKES A BASE RESOLUTION.

Ad followed the woman, and soon they entered the house where her companion lay dying.

"I want to ease my mind," she murmured, "before I die; listen to me, and heed every word."

Ad took a seat, and the poor creature resumed:

"Years ago I lived in New York State and worked for a man named Wentworth. I was the nurse for his boy--a bright little fellow he was."

Ad started, but the woman, not noticing him, proceeded:

"I was too independent in those days, and thought I could do what I pleased. I got drunk, and Wentworth discharged me. This made me mad, and I determined to have my revenge."

She paused, and Ad, very much excited, waited for her to continue:

"I stole the child and went far away, where I would not be known. Two or three times I tried to kill him, but I could not do that; and at last I determined to abandon it, not caring whether it lived or died, but not wanting to kill it right out."

"I was then in Indiana, in the town of Columbus; I remember it well; and one night I wrapped the baby up in an old shawl of mine, and just laid it down in the path, not in the road, where the horses might have trampled it to death, but in the footpath."

"I don't know what made me do it, unless it was so nobody would ever know who the child was; but I took all of his own pretty clothes that were marked with his name, and kept them."

"The things he had on were coarse and common, while his own were beautiful things. He was found by two clowns, Dan Rice and another, and the other advertised for his parents, but nobody ever claimed him, and I didn't suppose they would."

"The years have passed away, and the child has grown up. I saw him yesterday in this very town, little expecting it. I knew him in a moment, though it is a long time since I saw him. I used first to keep kind of track of him by following the route of the circus in the papers, and once or twice I saw him perform, just to make sure it was he."

"It must be six years or more since I have seen him, and he's been all over the world since."

"He's taking to lion taming since, and just that would prove to me that it was he, for his mother had the same power."

"I have seen a rabid dog run at her in the street, and she would stand

and fairly charm that brute into subjection. I have known her to talk to all sorts of animals, and they seemed to understand her, too, and I believe she could have gone into a den of lions and they wouldn't hurt her a bit.

"He gets his power from her, of course, as he does his good looks. Don't I remember her face? His is the same, the exact image. I would know it a hundred years from now."

Her voice grew faint, and Ad's conductor handed her a glass of water.

"I'm dying now, and I shall never rest easy until I see the boy righted. You are his friend. I know, because I saw you walking with him. You are fond of him, and you will tell him all I have told you? I dare not see him myself. The things that I took from him are in that bundle at the foot of the bed. You will give them to him and tell him this story."

Ad nodded.

"That is right. He won't always want to be called Young Grizzly Adams, I don't fancy, and it's likely that he may see his father some day and will want to prove who he is. I swear to you, as I hope for peace, that he is the boy I stole, the son of Mr. Wentworth, who lived in Syracuse, New York, eighteen years ago."

"Is there any more?" asked Ad.

"No. Take the bundle and do as I ask. I know you will, you look honest. Tell him to forgive me for what I have done. Often have I repented it, but never have I tried to repair the injury done him. I am thankful that I saw him to-day. Fearing that I would not, I had the story taken down in writing and swore to it. Here it is."

The woman handed him a sealed envelope, which she slipped into his pocket and then put the little bundle under his arm.

"Swear to me that you will do as I bid you," said the woman, half arising in bed.

Ad did not have time to speak the words before a spasm seized the woman and she fell back in convulsions.

It was a long time before she was able to speak, but Ad dared not leave the room.

There seemed to be a spell upon him, and do what he would he could not break it.

He dreaded to give his solemn word to the dying woman, for base thoughts were passing through his mind—mean motives were exciting his breast.

He could not utter a lie in the presence of death, and he hoped, ay, wished, that the woman would die before she could again express her wishes.

Finally the dying creature rallied.

"Is he here?" she gasped.

"The young man?"

"Yes."

"He is."

"Bring him here!"

Ad advanced to the bedside.

"You will do my wishes?"

"Yes."

"You swear it, as you hope to go to Heaven, as you expect pardon for all your sins?"

Ad nodded.

"I do not hear you," she said. "Speak louder. Say 'I swear it!'"

"I swear it!" repeated Ad, in a whisper, but loud enough for the woman to hear him.

He had sworn to do that which he had no intention of performing.

He had given a false oath.

"That is enough!" murmured the woman.

They were her last words on earth.

A few pulsations, a gasp, a convulsive motion or so, and her limbs straightened out in death.

The young man stood by the bedside a few moments, and then seeing that the woman's companion did not notice him, stole quietly out of the house.

In the silence of his room at the hotel he opened the little bundle, examined the document he had received, and put both away in his trunk, the latter in a secret compartment which no one knew of but himself.

"Why should I hesitate?" he said. "Wealth and station are before me, a kind father and a luxurious home, all that I can wish, in exchange for a life of hardship and danger. My own parents are dead;

no one in this part of the world knows me; why should I not step into the affections of this man? Neil does not want it, will not have it. What should prevent me from usurping his place? Nothing!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO FALSEHOODS.

Ad saw nothing of the conspirators during the next day, and after the evening performance the show departed for another town.

The plan for Robbins and his cronies was for Adrian to worm out of Neil all that he knew of his parents, and then to personate the long lost son to old Wentworth.

The idea was to have the boy acknowledged by the old man, which they had no doubt he would do, and make Ad his heir.

The latter would be benefited thereby, and where Robbins would get paid for his trouble was just here.

Of course, Ad would have all the money he could spend. He, then, was to pay Robbins so much a month to repay him for having put the lad into so good a position.

At Wentworth's death, the property was to be shared evenly between Ad and Robbins. He might have demanded all, but he knew that as soon as the old man died, leaving Ad everything by will, it would be impossible to expose Ad then.

That was the plan proposed, and the boy was fished up and thrown into Neil's company, in order that he might learn all that was required to be known.

Unexpectedly, Ad had come in possession of a knowledge that would enable him to prove his false claim most successfully, and which gave him more ground to stand upon than anything that he could have heard from Neil.

He said nothing whatever to Robbins, but determined to act upon his own responsibility.

He had half promised the scoundrel to do as proposed, but now he meant to throw the old scamp overboard, and have nothing whatever to do with him.

"I shall be doing Neil a wrong," he said to himself, "but I shall not help that villain, who would like to see the poor fellow killed. I know I am acting a base part, but at least I shall have no accomplices."

What was the motive of the fellow Robbins in wishing Neil out of the way?

To be brief, he was the only relative that Wentworth had, other than Neil, and if the boy died before his father, Robbins would get the property.

His name was not Robbins, but Wentworth, and he was a distant cousin of the queer old gentleman's; but as he was known by the name of Robbins, we shall continue, for the present, to call him so.

The man saw that there was no use of trying to get rid of Neil, and consequently the best thing was to get possession of the money as soon as possible.

As long as Neil did not actually know who his parents were, and no one else did, it would not be a hard matter, thought he, to pass someone else off on the old man as his son.

The idea was at once put into practice, and Ad, who had no one but himself, and was a clever lad, was engaged to perform the part of the spurious claimant.

He had had a hard life, although he was such a good performer, and when the proposition was made to him, he eagerly snapped it up.

When he saw Neil, his resolution very nearly forsook him, for he became passionately fond of the boy in a short time, and it cut him to have to cheat Neil out of his rights.

There were plenty of good points about the lad, despite the many hard knocks he had had in the world, and this was one of them.

The temptation was too strong for him, particularly after he had heard the revelations of the dying woman, and at last he made up his mind to claim to be the son of Mr. Wentworth.

He also made up his mind that not one penny of the money should reach Robbins' hands, provided he should prove successful, and he was fully prepared to defy the old rascal to do his worst.

An incident occurred when they reached the next town, which did more to strengthen his position than anything else.

It was the hour of noon, and Neil was sitting in the parlor to keep out of the sun, Ad being just outside the open window, the blinds to which were closed.

Neil was alone, but in a moment Wentworth entered.

The lad was cornered, and of the following brief conversation Ad heard every word.

"My boy," said Wentworth, in an agitated voice, "will you answer me one question?"

"Yes, one and only one."

"Then tell me, is Adams, the clown, your own father?"

"Yes."

Poor boy, he little knew the trouble which that falsehood would cost him!

He suspected that the old gentleman was in the plot against him, and being prejudiced, he did not care to have any intimacy with him.

He thought that if he gave the man a decided answer it would settle the business, and that he would be free from annoyance, as he considered it.

Therefore he uttered a falsehood, a thing which is rarely justifiable, and which, in this case, was destined to cause him much vexation.

"I am obliged to you," answered the old gentleman. "I have made a mistake; sorry to annoy you—good-morning."

A few minutes later Crowell found the following note slipped under his door:

"You need not bother with my case any more, at least, so far as the young lion-tamer is concerned. He is not my son. He has told me himself that the clown is his father, and I know that he would not lie.

"W."

At that time Wentworth was busy, and Crowell did not see him until the afternoon.

Then he himself had just received a telegram from Denver to go there on important business, and he started at once without having a chance to speak to anybody, just catching a glimpse of Wentworth as the train left the station.

In the meantime, how had Ad profited by Neil's falsehood?

He realized instantly what a strong footing it would give him, and he decided to strike while the iron was hot.

Walking around the corner of the house, he came upon Wentworth as he was stepping upon the piazza, as if by accident.

He suddenly gasped, and fixing his handsome eyes upon the man, muttered, as if unconscious of saying anything:

"My God! that face—those eyes! Heaven, I have seen them before! Pray Heaven my dream be true!"

"What's the matter, my boy—what's the matter?" asked Wentworth, catching Ad in his strong arms and preventing him from falling.

"Tell me," said Ad, with terrible earnestness, and summoning all his powers of acting to his aid, "is not your name Wentworth?"

"Yes, to be sure it is."

"You lost a son, eighteen years ago—stolen by a vengeful nurse?"

"Good Heaven, boy! what do you know of this?"

"The child's clothes were marked 'N. W.?"

"To be sure they were."

"Then I am that child; I have those clothes in my possession, and papers to prove that I was stolen. I am your son!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAYING FOR HIGH STAKES.

As Adrian uttered these last words, he fainted away in Wentworth's arms—actually fainted, not pretended to do so, but really became unconscious, and, had not Wentworth caught him, would have fallen to the floor.

The fact was, the excitement had been too much for the poor fellow, for all his acting, and he fell in a dead swoon.

This helped him more than any trickery upon his part could have

done, and the old gentleman, convinced of his sincerity, carried him up to his room and applied restoratives.

"Now, my boy, tell me all about it," said Wentworth, when he at last recovered. "Deuced odd, upon my word; get the refusal from one young fellow—find another one all ready to own me—never saw the beat of it. Ahem! here I go, telling him to speak and then do all the talking myself—hem! just like me! Well, my lad, begin at the beginning and tell me the whole yarn."

Thereupon Ad told a remarkably straight story—pity if he could not, having got it all by heart, and the old gentleman believed every word of it.

He spoke of having an excellent recollection of his father, which was further strengthened by having often seen a portrait of him, which was stolen at the same time he was.

This was a fact, or, at least, there was a portrait of Wentworth's in the bundle, and Ad had made up his mind to introduce it into his narration for better effect.

He spoke of having always had this portrait, although he did not know how he had come by it, and did not know whose it was until he had met the woman.

This part of the story he told exactly as he had heard it, with the exception that in his version the woman had recognized him, and sent for him in order that she might relieve her mind of the dreadful burden upon it.

When he had finished, he took the old gentleman into his own room and showed him everything—the clothes marked with "N. W.," the miniature, the sworn statement and everything which corroborated his story.

In the interim since receiving the paper, he had doctored it to suit his purpose, so that there might not be a single flaw in the evidence.

He had opened the envelope without destroying the seal, and had then carefully perused the document, and where it spoke of Neil as Neil Adams, or Young Grizzly Adams, he had made the neatest erasures possible, and had supplied the names Adrian Laurens and "The Wonder of the Air," as he was called in the bills, doing the work so well as to make it almost impossible to detect the deceit.

Then he had resealed the wrapper, giving it the appearance of never having been tampered with, and at the right moment handed it to his supposed father.

Wentworth broke the seal, utterly demolishing it in his excitement, and read the statement with the most feverish anxiety.

It confirmed everything that Adrian had said, as why should it not? The oath of the woman appended to the bottom giving it all the more force.

Wentworth never doubted for a second that everything was correct, and he was delighted to find that his search had been rewarded in the most unexpected manner, and was even pleased to find that he had made a mistake.

"Shows me that I am the same old fellow," he said, with a laugh. "Always blundering—never could get things right in my life—your mother would tell you that, my boy—ha, ha! it's really quite amusing. Can't tell how much I'm pleased—quite impossible—in the circus, too; was satisfied that you'd been brought up in that evil—no wonder I mistook your comrade for you. What sort of a fellow is he, anyhow? Rather bumptious, eh?"

Ad could not be guilty of the added baseness of maligning the friend whose rights he had usurped, and he spoke in warm terms of Neil—fairly eulogized him, in fact.

"Well, maybe so—maybe," sputtered the old codger, wiping the perspiration from his face. "Should be sorry to say anything against your friend—deucedly sorry—treated me rather short, not at all like the gentleman, not a bit—good looking, too, quite handsome—could have sworn he was the one—don't now, though, can see it all in your face—handsome face, too—ahem! beg pardon, didn't mean to flatter you, my boy, but it's a fact."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AD WINS THE GAME.

He was indeed handsome and he knew it, and liked to be told so, albeit a blush mantled his cheeks at the blunt speech of Wentworth.

This only told in his favor, however, and the comical old fellow

slapped him on his back and roared with laughter, and said it was just like his mother, she used to blush like a garden of roses whenever any one praised her.

"Well—well, I never was so happy," remarked the old man at last. "Delighted to have found you my lad, delighted—charmed. We will start right away this afternoon; no more flying through the air, running the risk of breaking your neck every time—fine thing to train a poor boy to I must say; bad as taming lions. You won't be sorry to part with the circus?"

"I can't leave them so suddenly, my dear father," said he, "it wouldn't be right. I ought at least to finish my week out. I have not been engaged long and they paid me in advance."

"Do you want to stay? Had you rather break your neck than go with me?"

"No—no, indeed not," said he, catching Wentworth's hand frantically. "I will do anything, go anywhere; do not leave me now that I have found you."

"There—there, my lad, don't say anything more about it!" said Wentworth, consolingly. "I understand your feeling, quite honorable—just like your mother for all the world! If Hookem and Catcher, no—no, Catch her and Hook 'em; oh pshaw! if the circus fellows make a fuss, let 'em. I can pay 'em enough, I guess, to fix that up all right."

"They would release me if you asked them, I fancy; I only thought it would be best to say something to them about it."

"Yes—yes, so I could. At any rate, you're a minor, and I've got a right to control your actions. By George, I'll put it that way, that'll hook 'em and catch 'em both, ha-ha; not bad for an old fellow, eh?"

"Perhaps I had better perform this afternoon," said Adrian at length, "because I am billed heavily and should not like to disappoint them."

"Well—well, take your last tumble this afternoon then, but after that, you retire to private life as the long lost son of old Wentworth—God bless you."

So it was arranged that Ad should perform in the ring for the last time that afternoon, and that Mr. Wentworth should then make a formal demand of Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum for the release of his son.

Everything worked well for the success of Ad's scheme, and poor Neil, who had, by his falsehood, utterly ruined his own case, seemed in a fair way to be done out of a fortune.

He did not see Ad until the latter was dressed for his trapeze act, and then he noticed that his chum looked unusually excited, even for him.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" he said, kindly. "You don't look at all right."

The poor fellow was cut deeply by these words, and it was with difficulty that he restrained the hot tears from welling into his eyes.

There was something in him, after all, and he devoutly wished he could have been spared this last trial.

"Oh, nothing," he said, as if trying to conceal something. "I wonder if the ropes are all secure."

"I'll go and see," said Neil. "I wouldn't have anything happen to you for the world."

How those words, uttered in the kindest spirit, stabbed the young impostor to the heart.

Truly, the way of the transgressor is hard, and Ad never felt the truth of the old saying so forcibly as at this moment.

"My God!" he muttered, as Neil ran off, "this will kill me! I must leave this life—leave him, or the truth must make itself known! What a miserable ingrate I am! I could throw myself among his lions! They, too, have imbibed his love for me—they would not hurt a hair of my head."

He strolled over to the cage, which had not yet been drawn into the entrance, and patted Castor on the head.

"Good-by, old fellow," he said, with trembling lips. "You would really do me a service if you were to snap my head off."

"Pshaw, this is childish!" he muttered, half angrily, as he strode away. "I have entered upon this thing, and there can be no going back. I have burned the bridges behind me, and must proceed."

In a few minutes he met Neil returning from his tour of inspection.

"Everything is as sound as a dollar," said the young lion tamer. "You need have no fear."

"And yet I do fear something will happen to me," he answered, having conceived a desperate plan.

"Nonsense! If I should feel that way, the lions would chew me to pieces. Cheer up, old fellow; I'll bet that you never did so well as you are going to do this afternoon."

"He would not say that if he knew what I know," thought the lad to himself.

"If anything should happen to me, Neil," he murmured, half-audibly, "if I should be taken away, you would remember me kindly, would you not?"

"Remember you? Indeed I should. I would never forget you as long as I lived."

"Thanks; you are too kind. I hope you will always feel that way toward me, Neil; think only of my best side."

"Why—why, old man," said Neil, banteringly, "one would suppose you had already ordered your coffin."

"No—not but I know something is going to happen which may—"

"Halloo, Neil, old fellow!" said Adams, approaching at that moment; "they'll be ready for you in about three minutes."

"Then I must go and talk to the kittens," and away he ran as merry as ever.

"Well, Ad, my boy," said the old clown, "how do you feel? You look first-rate. You beat the crowd on the trapeze business all hollow. One would swear you were born on a trapeze bar."

"Thank you, Mr. Adams; you and Neil are the best friends I have."

"It's all your own fault," said Adams, with a laugh; "you shouldn't have such plaguey attractive ways about you."

"Hark! what is that?"

"Merely the excited multitude giving vent to their feelings. Neil is on. What's the matter? What makes you start so? Are you sick?"

"No—not but I feel as if something terrible were going to happen—something unexpected, some accident."

"Tut—tut, my man, you mustn't feel like that, it's unprofessional."

At last the time came for the young trapezist to make his final appearance in public.

His costume was unusually tasteful, and he earned a well-merited round of applause as he tripped into the ring.

He had never exerted himself as he did that day, and even the professionals themselves were electrified, and applauded as vigorously as did the spectators.

He performed the most difficult feats in a manner that was perfectly thrilling, and fairly excelled himself in reckless daring.

He was desperate, and would not have cared, for the moment, whether he killed himself or not, although this feeling afterwards passed off.

He meant to hurt himself in some way, not dangerously, of course, but enough so to afford an excuse for his leaving the circus, in case Hooker & Ketchum should offer any objection to his going, which he feared they might.

Consequently, in one of his airy flights, he seemed to miss his hold and drop to the bar below, whence he fell heavily to the ring and lay as if stunned.

Wentworth was in the audience, and had been fretting every instant, fearing that something would happen.

When the boy fell, he sprang to his feet with an agonized cry.

"My God! he is killed—my boy is killed!" he shrieked, and in an instant he was in the ring and holding Ad's head in his lap.

The boy was removed amid great excitement, but presently one of the employees came out and said that he was not killed, but would not be able to perform again that day.

This calmed the audience, and the performance went on.

Mr. Wentworth spoke to Hooker at once, telling him that he had discovered his long lost son, and that he could not have him periling his life any longer.

He explained the affair in a few words, and offered to make good any losses the firm might meet in being deprived of Ad's services.

The doctors pronounced Ad's case more dangerous than it really was, and said that he would not be able to perform again for six weeks.

This decided Hooker, and he accepted a handsome present from

Wentworth, at the same time wishing him joy of his new found son.

Ad was removed to the hotel, where he expressed himself as perfectly willing to go away on the next train.

"Why, they said you couldn't get up for six weeks."

"Nonsense! My back is lame, but I can travel well enough, I guess. I want to get away from here as soon as possible."

"So do I."

When Neil was dressing for the night performance, Hooker told him the news.

"I'm glad of it," he said. "The old gentleman swore that I was his son, and wouldn't hear anything to the contrary, so now I hope he's satisfied. I am sorry to lose Ad, but I'm glad he has been so fortunate."

Old Robbins heard of the matter the next morning, Ad and his supposed father being then many miles away.

"Oho! that's the game, is it?" he growled. "Go away and say nothing about it. I must follow him up and draw my first dividend."

Ad, at the same moment, was muttering to himself:

"Robbins, you old reprobate, I can defy you now. Do your worst!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RENCOUNTER AND THE DEFIANCE.

ABOUT a month after Ad's departure from the circus, that young gentleman was promenading one of the most fashionable streets of the city of Indianapolis, elegantly dressed and having quite the air of a gentleman.

His good looks and elegant bearing attracted great attention, and he was quite the rage in society, his romantic story increasing the impression which he would have made at any rate.

He had good taste, and the means to gratify it, and his clothes set upon him in a manner that showed him to be a gentleman born, for the manufactured article never has the same look as the *bona fide* one, no matter what people may say to the contrary.

In the interim, old Wentworth, his father, as we shall call him for the present, had become very much attached to the young impostor, and thought the world of him, doing everything he could to show his affection.

He had been renamed Nathaniel Wentworth, called Nate for short, and by that name we will speak of him until it becomes necessary to give him his proper appellation.

While he knew that but for his own *finesse* he would never have attained to the position he now occupied, he nevertheless fully appreciated Mr. Wentworth's determination to find his son, and was grateful for all the kindness he had received at the latter's hands, at the same time so conducting himself that there should be no cessation of the same.

While his conscience still smote him for the part he had taken against his true friend, Neil Adams, although not so poignantly as at first, he regarded his father with a great deal of real admiration, and honestly did his best to please him, not merely from policy, but because he liked to do so.

The old gentleman was never tired of talking about his son, and of doing all that was possible for him to do.

Nate had horses at his disposal, was promised a yacht to use on the lake if he chose to live in Chicago at any time, and an elegant boat with which he often practiced on the river; had a valet, coachman and other servants, all to himself, and never lacked a plenty of ready cash in his pocket.

He spent what he wanted wisely, though with no stinting hand, but he did not spend half as much as Wentworth supposed he did, and yet the old fellow was always pressing money upon him, telling him that there was plenty more, and that he must enjoy himself.

Every time he received any money, he put by more than half of it, and let it remain untouched, and there was no reason why it should not be, for he always had more than enough for everything.

This reserve fund was not put away to be used in case his false

claim was exposed, as it might be supposed it would, so that he would have something to live on, but it was a conscience fund.

Every dollar of that money was to go to Neil, for the young man had not the least doubt that some day the rightful heir would be discovered, and when that time came, he meant to make as complete restitution as lay in his power.

It might seem strange that with the courage and honorable feeling requisite to do this, he might have gone a step further and proclaimed boldly Neil's absolute right to everything, but he was not strong enough to do that.

His father fairly idolized him, and he could not bear the thought of undeceiving him, knowing that it would nearly break the old man's heart.

Then, too, Neil had denied himself to his father, and it would be hard to make Wentworth believe that the boy whom he had at first thought to be his son would tell a falsehood.

In view of all these circumstances, the young man's position was a trying one, and he could scarcely be blamed for acting as he did.

He was not altogether bad, though he was bound to take care of himself, first of all, and could not bear to think of parting with all that made life pleasant to him, though at the same time he felt that he owed a duty to Neil.

It was while he was still in the heyday of his brilliant career that an incident occurred which demonstrated most clearly that he was not absolutely safe from detection, and that he would have to play his cards more adroitly than ever, if he wished to continue his winning game.

He was walking along easily, as we have said, when he suddenly came face to face with the prime conspirator—his whilom confederate, Robbins.

The man caught him by the button hole immediately.

"Aha, my gay young plotter, you played a clever game, did you not?" said the old scamp, with a leer. "Upon my word, it was well done, but you forgot that there was a bargain between us. I will take my first month's dividend now, if you please."

"I do not understand you."

"Oh, no, of course not! If you object to the public street, suppose we go to the park and talk over matters. By Jove, you carry it on well. Oh, I knew you were a deep one when I engaged you for the job."

"Really, you must excuse me," said Nate freeing himself, "but this is probably a case of mistaken identity. You probably take me for someone else."

"No, I don't. I've been watching you for some minutes. You do it well, Ad, and no mistake. No wonder you hoodwinked old Wentworth so nicely. You rather startled me, in fact, by the suddenness of your movements. I tell you, there's nothing like striking while the iron is hot, Ad, my boy."

"My name is not Ad."

"I know it isn't now—it's Nathaniel Wentworth. I say, how did you manage to do it all so quickly? I fancied you would need our help."

"It matters not how I convinced my father of my identity. I kept my own counsel then, and I mean to do it still."

"That's all right—I shan't trouble you in that quarter, if you don't want to give yourself away. You're going to let me have my monthly allowance, though, I suppose?"

"For what?"

"For putting you where you are."

"I owe my elevation to my own efforts entirely. I tell you that I know of no bargain whatever. The means taken to establish my identity were of my own devising. I am the son of Mr. Wentworth, and that is all you need to know."

Robbins was staggered by the bold stand which the young man took, and knew not what to make of it.

That the boy had discovered something entirely unexpected was apparent, and also that it was something which enabled him to act entirely independent of his former abettor.

"You've done that young lion-tamer out of a fortune very nicely," resumed Robbins, "and all because of his stupid blundering."

"Mr. Neil Adams thoroughly convinced my father, in my hearing, that he was not his son, and Mr. Wentworth is as fully satisfied as can be that I am the rightful heir."

"That's all right—that's just what we meant to make him think,

only you got the start of me. Come—come, now, quit your fooling, and give me fifty dollars; I'm internally short."

"I shall give you nothing."

"You won't?"

"No."

"Then, by Heaven, I will denounce you!" said the enraged villain, speaking in a rapid manner. "I will show you up in your true colors, tear the false mask from your face, deprive you of your riches, expose the whole plot!"

The young man looked the rascal steadily in the face and said, slowly:

"You can do nothing; you are utterly powerless, and I defy you!"

Then turning upon his heel, he walked away in the same careless manner as before, leaving the baffled villain perfectly dumfounded.

CHAPTER XX.

BOWLED OUT AGAIN.

"By the eternal!" muttered Robbins, as Nate disappeared. "He's a deuced sight smarter than I ever gave him credit for. What the demon can he have got hold of, to be able to work without me? I know that young Adams is the right one as well as I know anything, and yet this fellow defies even me."

He turned away, muttering to himself:

"I'll get even with him yet, see if I don't, if I have to play into the other fellow's hands! Why, he acts as independent as if he owned a bank."

That evening after dinner, as Mr. Wentworth was sitting in the library of his elegant residence on one of the fashionable avenues, the footman entered.

"There is a gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

"What's his name—didn't he give you his name? Always want to ask that, you know, because I am not always at home. Ahem! Deuced convenient invention of society, that! Enables a man to get rid of disagreeable visitors. Mighty handy, upon my word!"

"He said you would know him, sir, when you saw him. Has important business to communicate, I understand."

"Ahem! Who the mischief is it, I should like to know?"

The well-drilled attendant waited a few moments in silence, and then said, deferentially:

"Shall I show him up, sir?"

"Yes, you may—confound my curiosity! Well—well, if I don't want to see him, I can easily get rid of him—send for this gorgeous fellow here, and tell him to show the obnoxious individual the door. Ahem! times have changed—used to kick a fellow out if I didn't want him around. More polite way of doing business now. Yes, you may show him in, and be hanged to him."

The footman retired with a bow, and pretty soon ushered in Robbins.

"Good-evening," said the latter, when the footman had departed at a signal from his master—"good-evening!" Here he took a seat. "I've come on business. You know me?"

"Ahem! should think I might—infernal scoundrel!—not likely to forget him in a hurry, blame him!" muttered the eccentric old gentleman, half to himself. "What do you want, anyhow?"

"Ahem! I came to warn you against an impostor. You have taken a serpent to your bosom."

"H'm! plaguey sight better than a toad; wonder if he'll see the application. H'm! what if I have? Can't you speak plainly? What are you driving at?"

"In a word, you have been imposed upon; you have acknowledged as your son, a person who has no claim upon you."

"H'm! got at it finally. Well?"

"The person you call your son, is not; he is no relation. I will give you the credit of having been deceived, as I do not think you would foist an impostor upon the public in order to cheat anybody."

"Thank you; obliged to you for your opinion—never asked for it, though, did I? So you charge my son, Nathaniel Wentworth, with being an impostor?"

"Yes. He has deceived you; he has wheedled the story he has told you out of the real heir, who is ignorant of the great wrong done to him by this clever young villain! Oh, I know him well!"

"H'm! might as well let the boy know what the dog has to say—fair enough; can't bear to see him stabbed in the dark."

He touched the bell, and the gorgeous footman appeared.

"Ask Mr. Nate, if he is still in the house, to step in here a few moments."

"Yes, sir; he is just going out; he called James up to his parlors not a minute since."

"Deliver my message; tell him I want to see him at once, when he has finished dressing, of course."

The man disappeared, and Wentworth lit a cigar and began reading the paper as if there was nobody in the room but himself.

Ten minutes passed, during which time Robbins was in a most uneasy frame of mind.

He tried to speak several times, but Wentworth paid him no attention, whatever, and he finally desisted.

At length the door opened, and Nate, faultlessly attired in an elegant evening costume, entered and walked over to where his father was sitting.

"You want to see me, sir?" he said.

"Yes; sit down, my boy; here, at my side. Do you know this person?" nodding stiffly toward Robbins.

"I have seen him."

"Where?"

"Hanging around the circus. He was constantly trying to do young Adams a mischief."

Robbins winced, and Wentworth continued:

"Do you know what he says? that you are not my son."

"I am not surprised, father; indeed, I was prepared for it."

"Prepared for it?"

"Yes, sir. I met him this afternoon, and he said he was going to expose me—show me to be an impostor. I simply defied him to do it. I invite him to the contest."

"By Jove! Nate, you're a tramp, though you ought to've horse-whipped the rascal. Now, Mr. What's-your-name, you can go ahead. Tell your little story; we are listening."

Thus invited, Robbins charged Nate with conspiring to deceive Mr. Wentworth, with having humbugged Neil out of all he knew upon the subject, and then passed himself off as the rightful heir.

"Very well, Mr. Robbins, as you call yourself. Now, let me tell you what you don't know. You probably are aware that the young lion tamer was found dressed in coarse garments, with no marks upon them. Very well, now to proceed: My child's clothes when he was stolen were marked. They have been returned by my son, whom you now see; and, furthermore, he has been identified, and I have a sworn document, which I can produce, if necessary, which declares him to be my son."

"Shall I tell you, sir, what this man proposed before I discovered my identity?" said Nate, turning to his father. "He wanted me to pretend to be your son, and then divide the money with him."

This was a strong shot and told well, Nate immediately following it up with another:

"I refused indignantly, and then by chance I found out who I was. The baffled scoundrel has been trying to kill young Adams, and then say that he was your son, but Neil was too much for him, and he was obliged to leave town to prevent being ducked in the horse-pond. Then he made his base proposals to me, thinking that because I was a poor, friendless boy, I would fall an easy prey to his scheming."

The miserable rascal actually turned pale with rage.

His own weapons had been used against him, and if he acknowledged having approached Nate, or if he denied it, the result would be the same.

"Do you suppose I don't understand your motive?" said Wentworth. "You're my cousin; more's the pity—would get everything if I died without an heir—to your interest to dispute the boy's claim. Of course—plain as daylight. No wonder you try to prove him an impostor."

"He is one, I swear it!"

"H'm! who'd believe you under oath? No one. No use, Cousin Wentworth, I know your plans; know your bad habits, always was plotting—better stop it. My son's claim is perfectly legal, and you can't break it, that's all I've got to say. Good-evening."

Bursting with rage, the man bounded into the street and growled to himself:

"Regularly bowled out again, by all that's bad! That boy's too much for me, I must own. How did he get hold of the clothes? Confound it, I never thought of that! He's too clever to upset easily, and as the old fool believes in him, what's to be done? Get rid of him!"

That's it, and thus I've nothing to fear from either of the young rascals!"

CHAPTER XXI.

NEIL LEARNS HOW HE HAS BEEN WRONGED.

LET US return to Neil, whom we have left rather unceremoniously out in the cold, while following the fortunes of the handsome young scapegrace who had so cleverly done him out of a fortune.

The show was in one of the Indiana towns, expecting to stop at Richmond, Cambridge, Columbus, Indianapolis and other places along the route toward the East.

Neil was walking up and down in front of the hotel early one evening, previous to leaving for the circus grounds, when a strange woman accosted him.

"You are Neil Adams?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Why haven't you presented yourself to your father and secured your inheritance?"

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you know that you are the son of Mr. Wentworth—haven't you been told by your friend?"

"What friend?"

"One of the performers; a young man like yourself, the one that swings over the heads of the people and all that sort of thing; the 'flying wonder,' I believe they call him."

"Adrian Laurens?"

"I think so."

"He hasn't been in the company for more than a month. He found his father, from whom he had been stolen when a boy, and went away with him; where, I do not know."

"Went away with his father?"

"Yes; with Mr. Wentworth."

"And he did not speak to you about a revelation made to him—did not deliver you a small bundle of clothes and a sealed paper?"

"No."

"Then he has cheated you out of a fortune."

"What do you mean?"

The woman told him the whole story of the confession made to Ad, the packet entrusted to him, and the oath he took to deliver them safely to Neil.

The poor fellow then understood everything, and knew that Ad must have taken advantage of the lie he had told Mr. Wentworth, and represented himself as the lost child.

"And a few words would have settled everything," he muttered. "Fool that I was, my suspicions have ruined me. How was I to know that Wentworth and Crowell were not in league with Robbins? Appearances were against them, certainly."

"It may not be too late now," said the woman; "you can advertise for the man."

"But I have told him with my own lips that I am the son of Adams, the clown, and have treated him with the greatest rudeness. He will now believe that I am deceiving him and trying to get his money."

"Then we must find out this young man and expose him."

"No—no, let him alone; it is right that I should suffer for my baseness. Mr. Adams has been more than a father to me, and I will never leave him as long as he lives."

"But some day you will become old, and will not care to continue your perilous business. Then you will want to retire and live on your money."

"I shall have saved up enough by that time. No—no, I can do nothing now; he must never know that I have been so false. Let Ad keep his position, poor fellow; his life has been a hard one until now, and I do not begrudge him his comfort nor his wealth—let him keep them both. It must have been a great temptation to him, though I should have thought he would withstand it."

The woman went away, saying to herself:

"Right is right, and wrong is wrong, no matter how kind-hearted he may be. The other has broken his solemn oath and injured his friend. Let it be my work to set things right."

In the next instant almost, after the woman went away, what was Neil's surprise to meet the detective, Crowell.

"Good-evening," said the man. "So we meet again, do we? How are you, as lively as ever?"

"Mr. Crowell," said Neil, "I played a shabby trick on you the last time we met, and I wish to apologize."

"Did you convince old Wentworth that you were not his son?"

"Yes, and now it turns out that I am, and that he has taken up with an impostor."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Crowell, giving vent to a long whistle. "Who is it, do you know?"

"Yes; but I cannot betray him. I have only just this moment found out that he has imposed upon the old man."

"Well—well, here's an opportunity for a first class job," mused Crowell, as he walked away. "Wonder where the deuce the old fellow is? He runs about so much that you never can find him when you want him, and when you don't you are sure to run slap against him."

Three or four days after the meeting with Robbins, the latter not having appeared again, as Nate was down in the city, doing some business for his father, a "dodger," or small handbill, was thrust into his hand.

Instead of throwing it away, he spread it out and glanced over it, the head lines attracting his attention.

As he read it his face turned deathly pale and his limbs nearly gave out beneath him.

The wording was interspersed with numerous cuts, but the principal lines were as follows:

COMING!

THE GREAT AMERICAN CIRCUS,

Hooker & Ketchum, Proprietors.

See the grand aggregation of novelty stars, never before equalled by any other company.

YOUNG GRIZZLY ADAMS!

The world-renowned lion tamer.

FOUR AFRICAN LIONS LOOSE IN THE RING.

M'le. Rayon. Four funny clowns. A host of attractions too numerous to mention.

INDIANAPOLIS, THREE DAYS.

The circus was coming, and Neil would see him.

He must leave the city, for he knew full well that the sight of the lad he had wronged would unnerve him.

The show would not be along for a week nearly, and Nate breathed a little more freely, though the sight of the glaring posters, the next day—Neil and his lions being represented as large as life—brought up old memories.

"Father," said he, at dinner that night, "the circus is coming—Hooker & Ketchum's—I do not think I can bear the sight nor the memories it will awaken. I shall go away for a week."

"Wouldn't you like to see your old friend the lion tamer? You liked him, I believe, though I never fancied him myself."

"No—no, I cannot see him. I fear to have the old memories brought back. The very sight of those colored posters makes me think of all I have suffered. I had hoped to forget all this, but at such times it comes back to me."

"There—there, my boy," said Wentworth, "say no more about it. Go away for a month if you like. Take a run up into the woods or among the lakes. You've been studying too hard." For Nate was fitting for college under private tutors, and made rapid advancement despite his lack of schooling.

"I will, and I'll go away to-morrow."

"That's right, my boy, that's right."

The next day Nate packed up his things, and sent them off to the mountains of Wisconsin.

He did not follow them, however, but finding out in what town the circus was staying that day, he despatched an express package to Neil Adams.

That package contained the sum of one thousand dollars, and the following lines without date or signature:

"This money belongs by right to you, and is part restitution. There will be more as time passes."

The package was not sent from Indianapolis, but from a small place on the railroad, twenty miles north.

It reached Neil that night, and he was very much astonished thereat.

He suspected that Ad had sent it, and would have returned it, had he known where to direct it. He finally concluded to keep it, putting it away carefully among his clothes and never touching a dollar of it.

He said nothing to Adams about it, or that he knew his parentage, fearing that the kind-hearted clown might think he wanted to leave him.

In the course of time he reached Indianapolis, but Nate was now hunting and fishing in the woods, and Wentworth had closed his house and gone to New York.

Of course, Neil did not know that Wentworth lived in Indianapolis, and did not look for him, but Robbins did, and on the second day he ran across Neil in the street.

"You want to clear right out of this town," said Neil, with energy, when he saw Robbins, "for if the boys catch sight of you they will make it particularly warm for you."

"Now just listen to me a moment," said Robbins. "I am your friend. I know who you are and how you've been chiseled out of a fortune. Your father lives in this very town," and the old scamp gave him the street and number.

"All right," said Neil, "I'm glad to know it; but, as I told you before, you want to make tracks at once, or I'll put you in jail. You attempted my life more than once, and may do so again. You see, I know you, and I give you warning that I will have you clapped in jail if you stay here another hour."

"But I am your friend."

"I don't want you—won't have you—wouldn't take you as a gift; so get out."

"Don't you want revenge on Ad Laurens?"

"No, not through you, at all events; so stir yourself, or you'll get into trouble."

"Well, of all the ungrateful young fellows that walk the earth," muttered Robbins, as he walked away, "these two take the prize. I can't do anything with them. I'll prove this young fellow to be the rightful heir, and then I'll get rid of him, confound me if I don't."

The circus was at Columbus once more in a few days, the place where Neil had been found by Dan Rice and Adams, but in the interim it had grown into a beautiful city of double the number of inhabitants.

The morning after their first performance there, Neil was startled to learn that Edna had disappeared, and that she was supposed to have been carried off by a party of tramps who had encamped in the woods on the outskirts of the city.

"To the rescue!" cried Neil, "and let us show these fellows what a circus company can do!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAMPS—EDNA A PRISONER—DEFIED.

In the very heart of the woods, around a bright fire, sat a dozen or more tramps or gypsies, it would be hard to tell which they were, chatting and telling stories.

Not far off was a hastily erected shanty, and near it were a couple of horses, most likely stolen from some farmer.

The men were eating their breakfast, which they cooked over their own fire, and which had been procured from the neighboring hen-roosts and potato-fields, for the band scorned to buy anything but rum.

Of the latter commodity there was a liberal supply, and each man took frequent potations from a flask he carried in his pocket.

Not all of the men were awake, for a dozen at least lay fast asleep a few feet away, their drunken orgies of the night before having rendered them indifferent to time or place, for they were stretched out upon the bare ground, and were in a fair way to sleep until night.

Those who were awake were a decidedly hard lot altogether, though they were neither dirty nor ragged, like the average tramp.

He who seemed to be the leader was a powerful fellow, with dark hair and beard, the latter quite long, dressed in blue clothes, and having a general flashy appearance.

He wore several rings, two watches and a diamond pin, and about his neck, in lieu of a collar, was a red silk neckerchief tied in a loose knot.

The butt of a heavy revolver showed between his short coat-tails, and from the top of one of his boots, into which the trousers were tucked, protruded the handle of a knife.

This man was called Dan Brown, and he was a criminal of the worst class, being even at the time a fugitive from justice.

He sat a little apart from the rest and smoked a big cigar, the others having nothing but clay pipes to solace themselves with.

He had finished his breakfast, and was evidently turning some project over in his busy brain, for his brows contracted every now and then with a deep scowl as if he was displeased with something.

Among the crowd was the man Jake Burns, who had been so ignominiously expelled from the circus, and he seemed to be just where he was most fitted to live—among blacklegs and tramps.

"Jake, go and stir up the old woman," said Dan, suddenly, pointing toward the hut.

The man arose and went toward the hut, whence, in a few moments, came the sound of angry voices.

"Go back to your master, fool, and tell him to be careful who he sends!" said a hoarse female voice, "or by the Lord, I'll break your unmannerly skull!"

"Easy—easy—you old hag!" retorted Jake. "Two can play at cracking skulls. Arouse your lazy pegs and go see what Dan wants. You're no use and no ornament; it's a wonder the farmers' dogs haven't shaken the life out of you long ago. There's only one reason."

"And what's that, rattle-head?"

"They're afraid of being poisoned if they set tooth into your dirty skin; you're enough to breed a plague."

A sudden whizzing sound was heard, followed by a series of yells, and Jake went flying from the spot as fast as his legs would take him.

The hag had drawn a whip from under the ragged shawl that hung over her bony shoulders, and Jake had received several sharp cuts before he knew what was the matter.

At the next moment the irate creature approached Dan, muttering and champing the few tusk-like teeth that still remained in her shriveled jaws.

She was bent nearly double with age, and was clothed entirely with filthy rags, once of different colors, but now all of the same grimy hue.

Her hair was thin and straggling, being nearly white, or would have been had it not been for the dirt which clung to it, and her almost toothless gums, withered and wrinkled face, deep-set, glittering eyes, gave her a most weird and unnatural look, as though she had been one of the witches pictured in old legends.

She carried a stout staff as a cudgel, upon which she leaned, and besides this retained the whip under one arm, ready for use at the shortest notice.

"What d'ye want, cut-throat?" she hissed, fastening her piercing eye upon Dan as she came up.

"Well, hag, I want to know if my guest is awake."

"Your guest? Your prisoner, you mean! Don't talk nonsense to me! Yes, hound! she is awake, no thanks to you, and has been so all night."

"Crying, I suppose?"

"Not she! That's not her sort. She despises ye, Dan Brown, laughs in yer teeth! Ho—ho—ho! You won't tame her spirit soon, I can tell ye. She isn't like that poor girl ye stole away, and then—"

"Curse you!" roared Dan, springing to his feet, "haven't I told you more than once never to speak of that again? —you, d'ye want me to cut out your miserable heart?"

"Ye daren't!" hissed the hag, pointing her skinny finger at him. "I can bring ye to the gallows, Dan Brown, with just one word—one word! and I'll do it, too, I'll do it some day, an' ye're not heedy of what ye say, bear that in mind!"

"Stand aside, you old fagot!" and Dan strode toward the shanty, suppressing a terrible oath.

He was afraid of the old vixen, but dared not let his companions see it, so he quickly got out of sight.

He threw open the door of the shanty, and there, seated upon a heap of clean hay, was a beautiful young girl, who met his gaze with a glance expressing the bitterest scorn and contempt.

The girl was Edna Dart, whom Dan had abducted the night before.

"Well, my beauty," he said, "how are your spirits this morning? You look handsome enough to kiss!"

He advanced and attempted to put his arms around the young lady, but the latter, springing to her feet with the swiftness of a deer, stood facing him with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Advance at your peril!" she cried. "I know you, now, murderer, perjurer and thief! Touch me and I will kill you!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

EDNA'S PLUCK IS DISPLAYED.

DAN's face turned a livid purple as Edna spoke these brave words, and then as quickly paled to an ashen hue.

"Beware, girl!" he cried. "You know not of what I am capable!"

"I do, Dan Gregory, I know too well. You murdered my father in the Australian bush to get his gold, and now you wish to exercise your vengeance upon his child."

"And so I will if you don't keep quiet."

"You know well that I am a witness to that crime, and though but a child at the time, the scene is impressed upon my memory, never to be effaced. You think you can escape because you have fled to America, but you are mistaken."

Dan merely laughed, but he felt uneasy, nevertheless.

"You are an American, your victim was an American, and an accusation of murder may be made anywhere. You didn't think to find me again, did you? You perjured yourself when you told my poor dying mother that her husband had been killed by savages, but you did not reckon on me."

"No, you young tigress, I did not, and I don't yet."

"It was very fine to abduct a young girl from the circus, but you didn't think to see me, I presume."

"There's where you are mistaken," laughed the villain; "I just did that to see you, and I have a proposition to make."

"I will not hear it."

"Then you die, that's all I can say."

"Do you think to frighten me, Dan Gregory, or Dan Brown, whatever you call yourself—do you think I have no friends?"

"They will be of no use to you now, my angel!"

"What new deviltry are you up to now—what have you done with the gold you robbed my father of? Where are the papers you took from him?"

"The money is spent, and the papers, being of no use to me, I have destroyed."

"Liar, I do not believe you. Those papers are of importance to me, and you know it! You have them in your possession now, I would swear to it."

Dan laughed triumphantly.

"Suppose I have," he said, "what then?"

"What do you want for them?"

"Yourself."

"Never!"

"Then remain an unacknowledged beggar since you prefer it. Those papers alone can prove your identity and provide you with a fortune. I will give them up on the condition I have named."

"I will not accept it. I fear you not, and shall denounce you to the authorities."

"Ha-ha! you cannot; you are in my power. I could kill you if I chose, but there are better things than that. I will give you another day to think it over."

"My answer will remain unchanged. I despise and defy you. You cannot do me the least harm. My friends will soon come to my assistance, and then you will be punished according to your deserts."

"Your friends? I suppose you reckon the young lion tamer as one of them."

Edna blushed and Dan proceeded with a most fiendish and blood-curdling laugh.

"Ha-ha! he won't help you much; we settled his case last night. He got too free, and we just tipped him over into the river."

"Monster, I know you are capable of committing murder upon any pretext, but think not to deceive me by any of your weak lies. Neil Adams lives, and is on your track!"

She spoke the truth, and Neil was nearer at hand than she was aware.

Suddenly an uproar was heard outside, and Dan ran out to see what it meant.

A boy had just come into the camp in hot haste.

He reported that the circus people, a party of indignant citizens and a posse of police were on their way to that spot, thoroughly armed, and determined to recapture the girl stolen the night before.

"Whew!" said Dan; "I didn't think it would make such a stir as all that."

He questioned the boy closely, and was convinced that he spoke the truth.

According to the lad's account, the party would be there in about five minutes, so there would be no time to lose.

Dan rushed to the hut, followed by Jake and half a dozen others, who seized Edna and placed her upon one of the horses, the villain taking the other.

Dan held the reins of both animals in his hand, Edna being upon his left, and then with a sharp cry he urged the beasts forward, and dashed along a narrow bridle-path leading deeper into the woods.

"Scatter every which way!" he shouted to his companions. "The force is too big for us to tackle. If there were only a dozen or so we might, but there must be at least hundred."

The tramps and outlaws quickly made their way out of sight, the sleeping ones having been aroused from their slumbers.

They became sober at once, and made all possible speed away from a place which was likely to be the scene of an encounter fraught with great peril if they remained.

Edna had been gagged, so that she could not attract attention by her cries; but the quick-witted girl had other means by which to acquaint her friends of her whereabouts.

While the preparations for departure were making, she tore her handkerchief in strips, and with a lead pencil wrote upon two or three of them the following:

"Carried off by tramps. Follow these bits of cloth. Dan Gregory, alias Dan Brown, is the leader. Rescue me as speedily as possible."

"EDNA."

One of these strips she stuck in a crack of the door, and after she and the tramps got under way, she threw the others into the bushes, one at a time, so that they would indicate the way she had gone.

Unseen by her captor, she also tore several strips from the bottom of the dress she wore, and attached small pieces to the bushes.

A ribbon that bound her hair served the same purpose, and it was not long before she lost her hat, presumably blown off by the wind.

"Confound it!" muttered Dan, with an oath, "what did you do that for? Those fellows will be sure to see it, and know which way we're going, for the path is a regularly beaten one."

"Then you'd better stop and pick it up," said Edna, the gag being now removed. "I shall need it, besides."

Dan stopped his horse and allowed Edna to recover her hat, minus one of its ribbons.

That incident, slight as it was, did more to effect the young lady's rescue than he had any notion of.

The girl remounted and the two steeds dashed along at a lively rate, Dan urging them forward by whip and spur.

Suddenly the horse that bore Edna stumbled and fell, the girl springing lightly to the ground.

The animal had lamed himself so badly that it was impossible to raise him again, at least not for the present.

Edna, during the previous halt had thrust a thorn into his foot, and the pain this caused him had made him stumble, which in turn caused the lameness.

"Curse the luck!" growled Dan, "you'll have to get up behind me; hurry now, be quick about it."

He finally seized the girl in his arms and drew her into the saddle in front of him.

She submitted, for she well knew that the delays she had caused were in her favor, and that rescue was at hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESCUE—MYSTERY—DOOMED.

As the brave young girl surmised, assistance was at hand, Neil having discovered the traces she had left behind her.

He flew along the path which the robber had taken, and had no difficulty in following it.

The bits of cloth and ribbon served as guide-marks, and then, too, the hoof-prints were still fresh enough to enable him to follow them, although he was not particularly skilled in woodcraft.

The delays occasioned by Edna helped him considerably, and at last he came to the spot where the useless horse had been turned loose.

He understood at once that Dan's horse was now carrying double,

and he increased his speed, hoping to shortly come up with the villain.

As he dashed along the path he heard the sound of horses' feet striking the hard ground, and knew that the end of the wood had been reached, and, indeed, he came to it a few moments later, and saw a horseman riding along a rocky lane.

A young lady was in front of him, as Neil saw by the fluttering skirts, and his heart gave a bound.

Drawing his revolver, which he now carried since the former attacks upon him, he fired at random.

The shot whistled over the head of the ruffian, doing him no harm, it is true, but indicating pretty plainly that Neil meant business.

Edna gave a scream, and Dan tried to prevent her, but Neil heard it and fired a second shot, which struck the villain in the shoulder, making him wince with pain.

He loosened his hold on the rein, and Edna pulled the horse back upon his haunches, bringing him to a dead halt.

Dan, seeing that matters were desperate, sprang to the ground, and then beholding only Neil, rushed upon him, drawing his own weapon.

Neil took aim, and pulled the trigger as the burly ruffian came upon him.

The weapon missed fire!

In an instant Dan had seized him by the throat and forced him to the earth.

He pressed the muzzle of his revolver to Neil's temple, and prepared to blow his brains out, being well in the mood for such a crime.

Poor Neil thought that it was all up with him, but in less than a second came deliverance.

A young man in hunting costume appeared on the bank above, and took in the whole scene.

An exclamation of surprise came to his lips, and raising the rifle he carried to his shoulder, he fired, almost without aim, it seemed, at the villain's head.

The bullet struck the barrel of Dan's revolver, knocking it from his hand, and saving Neil's life.

Then the youth sprang from the bank, caught hold of an overhanging branch, and swung himself down into the lane.

Dan jumped to his feet, but the intruder, unslinging his rifle, which he had thrown over his shoulder before he took his flying leap, drew a bead on him in an instant, and said, decisively:

"Clear out, or I'll riddle your miserable carcass through and through. That young man is my friend!"

Neil recognized the voice, and looking up beheld the face and form of his old companion, Adrian Laurens, as the young man was known to him.

"You here!" said Dan, in sudden surprise. "I thought you had died in—"

"Never mind where, but get out, or I'll shoot!"

"What are you up to now? Nothing honest, I'll be bound!"

"Clear out, I tell you, or I'll give you up to the officers. I hear them coming!"

"And this is the way you go back on an old friend, is it?"

"If you don't move before I count three, I'll put a bullet through you. One—two—"

Dan took the hint, and made tracks as fast as he was able, and he had scarcely disappeared when half a dozen of the circus men appeared at the other end of the lane.

"I am sorry to see you, Neil," said Nate, in a strangely excited manner, "and glad that I have been able to save your life. Good-bye, old friend."

He was making off when Neil cried out:

"Stop, stop, don't run away like that. I have no ill will against you, though I know what—"

He was gone, and Neil did not finish his sentence.

Edna now came up and joined Neil, the new arrivals having dispersed the boy.

"I am sorry to let that villain go," said Edna, "for he has papers which are of great importance to me."

"We must overhaul him by all means," said Neil, adding as the men came up: "Follow that scamp, boys, and get possession of him; he has property of value to Miss Edna."

Neil gave a description of the man, and the pursuers started off

after him on a run, while Neil took the young lady back to town on the fellow's horse, walking alongside.

Nate Wentworth had no idea that Neil was in the neighborhood, and he was on his way back to Indianapolis when he came across his old friend so suddenly.

He had stopped over at Columbus for a day in order to do a little shooting, and thus, by the merest chance, had come upon Neil.

He was glad to have been the means of saving the young man from peril, but dared not see him again, fearing that his resolution might break down.

He argued in this manner, that while he meant to make restitution to Neil when Wentworth was dead, he could not do it before, as the old man was so fond of him that to undeviate him would break his heart.

The old gentleman believed in him and loved him, and to tell him the truth would undoubtedly have been his death blow.

For that reason, and one cannot help honoring the misguided fellow for it, he kept silence, though his conscience had already begun to trouble him greatly.

It is an old adage that stolen fruits taste the sweetest, but Nate did not find it so by any means, and though his doting father lavished his money upon him he was not contented, and sought to forget his unhappiness in constant study or amusement.

He learned rapidly and the chances were that if he ever did fall from his high elevation, he would have acquired a deal of useful knowledge that would stand him in good stead.

After he had left Neil he plunged into the underbrush, not noticing in what particular direction he was going, but merely with the idea of getting away from Neil.

Before long he heard an exclamation, and glancing up saw the tramp standing in front of him.

"What did you mean, Ralph, by treating an old pal in that way?" said the man.

"Hush, I could have shot you, and put you and your knowledge of me in the grave, but I did not want to do that."

"You never used to interfere between me and my victims before!"

"This young man is my friend! He has been wronged bitterly, and nothing that I can do in his favor can wipe out the memory of those wrongs. If you harm him I will kill you."

"It is enough, if you command. The old ties are sufficient, whether in Australia or here, to bind me to obedience."

"By them, I command you to harm not a hair of that lad's head!"

"It is enough. I will protect him when in danger, if you say so."

"I do say so!"

"To hear is to obey!"

"One moment!" for Dan was turning to go. "You have papers belonging to the father of that young girl. Give them to me!"

"You would cheat me of my revenge!"

"By the ties that bind us together, by the moon and the stars, by the darkness and the night, I command you to give them up, and release the victim from your hold!"

The man trembled at these strange words, evidently some old countersign or formula of a secret society, and bowing his head, he said:

"As a Brother of the Night I must obey what my superior commands. His word is as binding upon me in one place as in another. You do not forget your own obligations?"

"No. My reasons are good. Give me the papers!"

Dan put his hand into his breast, and drawing out a sealed packet, handed it to Nate.

"It is well. You are a true Brother of the Night—receive this token of my esteem."

So saying, Nate put the papers into his pocket and gave the man some money—quite a considerable sum.

Just then a noise was heard as of men approaching.

"Go at once and fear not," said Nate. "Henceforth, know me not when you see me—believe me dead, treat me as a stranger. It is the third command, remember!"

Dan bowed, drew his hand across his eyes, and then dove into the thickest of the wood.

Nate started forward in another direction, and began calling lustily for help.

In a few moments the men came up.

"He has gone this way," cried the boy, in excitement. "Come after me quick, and we shall get him to a certainty!"

The men followed him on the false scent, and he led them so far astray in a quarter of an hour that they were completely bewildered.

Then he put them on the main road at a point which, if they followed it, they would have to go five miles to get back to where they had left Neil, though he knew of a short cut which would take off half that distance.

Then he suddenly left them to shift for themselves, and, after a long tramp, they reached the circus utterly used up.

The tramp or gypsy, whatever he was, had left the town by this time, and Nate was also not to be seen.

The next morning, however, very much to Edna's surprise, she received a packet of papers through the mail.

They were the missing documents which would establish her identity, prove her birth and station, and on the latter to a fortune. She knew not how they came, but, finding that they were all right, concluded not to bother her head any more about them.

The show proceeded upon its way, and a week later, as they were traveling through O. I. O., Crowell met Neil and told him he had discovered where the young impostor lived, and that he was ready to expose him at any time.

"What good can it do me?" said Neil. "The old man will have lost trust in me, for I told him a falsehood. Let matters remain as they are for the present; we cannot improve them."

"I fancy old Robbins is at work again," continued Crowell.

"What can be his motive for wanting to get rid of me?"

"It has something to do with the money, I fancy. He seems to be very bitter against your friend, also, from what I can hear, and threatens to expose him; says he is an impostor. I doubt if he can prove it."

"However, that is none of my affair," said Neil. "I propose to let things take their own course. Time will bring it all about as it should be."

Meanwhile, Robbins had found Nate again, and had demanded to be paid for his silence.

"I will give you nothing," said the young man. "No one will believe your story, and you cannot prove a single thing you say."

"I can get the woman who heard the statement concerning the child to testify," said Robbins.

Nate turned pale, but said nothing for a few moments.

"You can do nothing, prove nothing!" he said at last, in a firm voice; "and if you annoy me any more I will give you over to the police."

Robbins muttered to himself, and Nate walked away proudly, the secret thought within him being this:

"Perhaps I had better remove this reptile from my path, after all. He may prove dangerous. I know who will do the work!"

The blight of gold was beginning to fall upon him.

Who could tell what his next step would be?

At the moment the thought passed through Nate's mind he came upon a man, apparently a total stranger.

He gave the man a look, darting a glance toward Robbins, who was just disappearing, and made a rapid motion.

The man's eyes lit with feverish excitement, and he smiled and passed away.

In that brief space a bargain had been made, and Robbins had received his sentence of death!

CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERIOUS SHOT—A RELEASED DANCER.

"HOORAY!"

Snip—crack!

Crash—crash!

"Faster, boy, faster!"

The music sounds fast and furious, the multitude loudly cheers the clowns keep up their antics in the center of the ring, while on the outside away flies the thoroughbred bearing Mile Rayon on his back.

She seems a very ray of sunshine as she flings around in her gold-colored skirts, snapping the whip, and every now and then speaking some word to her horse.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Adams, "you behold the wonderful flying fairy, the queen of the arena, the empress of the sawdust, the fly of the tanbark, the air-rafts of the —"

"Stop, stop," cried the ring-master, cutting him short at snapping

his long whip; "you will confuse the good people with your long rigmarole."

"Not a bit, sir, not a bit; the people are not as stupid as you are."

"How now, sirrah, do you mean to insinuate that I am leading in comprehension?"

"That's what I said, sir."

"Pshaw! nobody minds what a fool says."

"Who's a fool?" demanded Adams, pretending to be very furious.

"You are."

"Say it again."

"You're a fool, sir."

"Again."

"You're a fool."

"Again."

"You're a fool!" thundered the ring-master, while all the people laughed.

"You are positive of it?"

"Yes."

"What proves to you that I am a fool?"

"You act like a fool, in the first place."

"Well, I don't dispute your knowledge of how a fool should act; you ought to know that, if any one should."

"And you look like a fool."

"I don't bear the slightest resemblance to you, so I don't know that can be."

"And, lastly," continued the ring master, striding up to the clown, and staring him in the face, "I see the fool in your face."

"Do you see him now?" asked Adams, doubling himself up in the most comical attitude, and thrusting his face forward at least a foot in advance of his body.

"Yes, I do. I see the fool in your face this very moment."

"Then my face must be a looking-glass," retorted Adams, slipping away, while everybody laughed and the ring-master snapped his whip.

Edna dashed around the ring on the bare back of her beautiful steed, and seemed a creature of the air, so lightly did she poised herself, changing her position constantly, and performing the most graceful evolutions with consummate skill.

She was standing with one foot on the horse's neck, and the other on his back, holding her arms above her head, her dark hair flying behind her, when there came a sharp crack like the snap of a whip.

The young girl uttered one cry and fell forward upon the gall-preg s'nd, clasping his neck with her snowy arms.

The intelligent animal came to a halt in a moment, and Edna rolled from his back and fell senseless in the ring.

Neil, old Adams, the ring-master, and half a dozen others ran forward, and the young lion tamer raised her tenderly in his arms.

"What is the matter?" asked Adams, excitedly.

"Some villain has shot her," said Neil, in a voice full of emotion; "see, the bullet has grazed her flesh. That shot was meant to be fatal."

"Who could have fired it?"

"I know not; bring some water. All see, she begins to revive, thank Heaven!"

Edna opened her eyes and looked about her, as if trying to comprehend what had happened.

Neil made her swallow a few drops of water, and then said, tenderly:

"Are you hurt, dearest?"

"No; I think not, though I feel faint. Luckily my horse is well-trained, or I might have received fatal injuries."

She was soon able to stand, and the ring-master announced that her injuries were not serious, but that he did not think it advisable that she should ride any more that evening.

The audience cheered at the welcome news that the young girl was not seriously hurt, and she bowed her thanks, retiring amid great applause.

"Who could have fired that shot?" said Neil to himself, in his dressing-room. "Not the man Dan, was it? I have not seen him since Edna's rescue."

No one seemed to know who fired the shot or whence it came, and the matter was a profound mystery, the only possible clew being the information given by a man in the top row of seats.

He said that just before the daring rider fell forward, he heard a bullet whistle past his head, and that he also heard the report, but

that nobody was behind him, and that whoever fired the shot must have taken aim through one of the loop-holes in the canvas behind him.

In support of this theory, footprints were found outside the tent at this point, and one of the side poles supporting the lateral canvas ran up right here, and could be easily climbed by an agile person.

The next thing was, who had taken all this trouble and what was his motive?

Neil had no idea who the person could be unless it was Dan Gregory, but he could not learn that the man had been seen in the town, and no person occurred to him who would have been likely to do such a thing.

It was time for him to go on with his lions, and dismissing the affair from his mind for the present, he sprang into his chariot and was driven into the ring.

The lions never performed better, though Castor appeared uneasy and sniffed the air from time to time as though something displeased him.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" whispered Neil; "is there anything wrong?"

The lion sniffed the air again and uttered a low growl, lashing his sides with his tufted tail.

"Something is up," muttered Neil. "By Jove! the others are becoming affected the same way!"

The act was almost over, but the lions seemed very uneasy, and imitated Castor's strange movements.

Neil was not afraid that they would hurt him, but he knew something was wrong, and determined to hurry through with his exhibition and get his lions safe in their cages.

In the event of any excitement he preferred not to have them loose, as their presence would be apt to create a panic, which might spread to them, and dreadful consequences could not be prevented.

Suddenly Castor uttered a doleful howl, in which he was joined by the others.

At the same time a strong smell of smoke was observed.

Then there came that most alarming of all cries in such places:

"Fire!"

The truth flashed upon him in an instant.

The intelligent brutes had scented the smoke before he had, and that accounted for their uneasiness.

He must act upon the instant, or he could not foretell what might happen.

"Ugh!"

He stamped his foot and pointed toward the curtains.

He dashed towards the entrance, tore the draperies aside, and sprung open the cage doors.

"Ugh!"

At the sound the lions gave a bound, sprang in and crouched down, Neil fastening the doors upon them.

At the same instant that startling cry again rang out upon the stillness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRE AND ITS PERILS—ROBBINS AGAIN.

"The tents are on fire!"

At the cry every person in the vast audience arose to their feet.

There would be a rush and a scramble, and hundreds would be trampled under foot, the weakest being the first to suffer.

Such a catastrophe must be prevented at all hazards.

Neil ran into the ring and held up his hands.

"Go out quietly and orderly, for God's sake!" he cried, in tones which none could fail to hear.

They paused momentarily before making a rush.

Adams, Hooker, Ketchum and others at once joined him.

"Go out quickly," said Hooker, "but don't make any fuss about it. There are exits enough for all!"

Those in the top rows dropped to the ground, and ran along under the seats to find a way out.

The side canvas was quickly dropped half way around, leaving plenty of room, and hundreds availed themselves of this opportunity, and hurried away.

The flames had caught one or two of the side-show tents, and, as

there was a strong wind, there was danger that they would spread to the larger ones.

Many persons, instead of retiring at once, lingered to see what the real extent of the danger was, thus hindering others from getting out.

The smoke increased, and the sparks began to fly about in a most alarming manner, the animals becoming frightened and roaring terribly.

"Get out—get out!" cried Neil. "The sooner you leave the better. Those who stay only hinder the others."

The crowd pushed and struggled—women screaming, men shouting, but all the time getting farther away from the danger.

Neil rushed to the dressing-room and found Edna, still in her ring costume, trying to calm her horse, who had run to her on the first alarm.

Their only way out—unless they followed the struggling multitude—lay right towards where the flames were the hottest.

If they remained, the burning tent might fall upon them, and yet it seemed fully as dangerous to force their way out in the other direction.

The cage of lions had been closed in, and run out, consequently, Neil feared no danger from that source; the escape of her he held dearer than life was what occupied his thoughts at that moment.

He tore the leopard's skin from his back, and jumped upon the horse, bidding Edna follow him.

She did so, and held on to Neil's belt, while he, throwing the skin over the horse's head, urged him forward.

He knew that the animal would rush for the flames, but there lay his safety in this instance, for a few rapid strides would take them into the fresh air.

"Forward, boy!" cried Edna, and at the sound the noble animal gave a snort and darted straight ahead.

The flames crackled and hissed, and the air seemed to stifle their very breath, but in a moment all would be well.

Neil felt his hair singeing as he dashed forward, but urging the animal right into the flames, they were borne beyond them in an instant, though the slightest faltering in that brief space would have been fatal.

The horse made the rush and the brave riders were safe.

Then the main chandelier becoming loosened from its hanging fell with a crash into the center of the ring, and all was dark, save for the light of the flames.

By this time the fire service attached to the company had got the flames nearly under control, and there was no more danger to the audience.

The cages of animals were all hauled out of the way, and attention was turned to the dressing-rooms where the costly wardrobes of the performers and the trappings of the horses were kept.

The first panic being over, everyone worked effectively, and nothing of any value was destroyed except the canvas over the circus department, the menagerie tents having been saved.

A few broken benches, a lot of chandeliers, tent-ropes and poles, and some harness was about all that was hurt, but in such an establishment as this, the loss could easily be repaired, though the demolition of a tent would have been a sad disaster to many a smaller show, and one that would have ruined it.

As Neil reached the outside and released the horse, springing to the ground with Edna in his arms, he suddenly heard a cry of astonishment.

Turning quickly, he saw a man in shabby clothes hastening away from the spot.

He dashed after him, caught him by the collar, and turned his face to the light so that he could get a good look at him.

The man was Robbins.

"You infernal villain!" said Neil. "I'll bet you are here for no good. It was you who fired that shot!"

It was a blow aimed at random, but it struck deep.

The man trembled and turned pale, fairly falling out of Neil's grasp in his terror.

It was he indeed who had tried to injure Edna, because he hated Neil, and the sudden accusation startled him.

He uttered a cry of alarm and rolled away from Neil, falling into a trench that had been dug for the placing of a horse-trough.

He disappeared so suddenly that Neil could not account for it, and

before he discovered the real state of the case, Robbins had made his way out, and was scurrying across the fields as though the fiend were in chase.

"So he's about again, is he?" thought Neil. "All right; I shall keep my eye upon him."

Someone else was doing this, unknown to the lad, and the villain's days were already numbered.

In the course of a day or so Crowell told Neil how he had unconsciously assisted Ad to make good his claim, by telling all he knew about the child Wentworth had lost.

"While pumping him in order to learn about you I gave him all the clew he wanted," said the man; "and then this revelation business did the rest. It's a pity you told the old gentleman a lie."

"It has got to be stuck to now," answered Neil, "or he will never have faith in me again."

"But this woman you saw, she swears that she will make the truth known."

"She must not."

"She has disappeared, and I fear has gone to find old Wentworth. She'll expose that young rep—"

"No, no, Crowell, you must not abuse him," said Neil. "He was my friend once, and it is my own fault that he is where he is. I deserve all this for my baseness."

"Come, come, now, you are too hard upon yourself. Things will come out all right in the end, never fear."

At that moment a messenger approached saying that the old clown was taken dangerously ill, and wished to see Neil immediately.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEIL LOSES A FRIEND AND ALSO AN ENEMY.

The kind-hearted old merry-maker had over-exerted himself at the time of the fire, had taken a severe cold, which had struck to his stomach and intestines, and when Neil was sent for was most alarmingly ill.

He was quite an old man now, and could not endure as much as formerly, so that the case was a more serious one than it would otherwise have been.

Everything was done for him that thought could suggest, but his name had been reached in the great muster-roll, and the summons must be obeyed.

He lingered through the night and the next day, the show being closed in consequence of his condition, as he was a general favorite, and no one felt like performing to the applause of thousands while their beloved companion lay dying.

He sank lower and lower, and that night, less than twenty-four hours after he had been taken sick, he passed away quietly, and Neil was left alone.

And yet not alone, for Edna remained, her grief at the sad event being almost as great as Neil's, and she did everything to comfort him.

Owing to his generous habits, the old man had but little property to leave, his salary due at the end of the week being just enough to pay for his funeral expenses and leave a trifle, which Neil gave to the canvas-men at Adams' request, being one of the last he made.

As far as money went, Neil had considerable; but it was not the pecuniary loss he felt, it was the taking away of a beloved companion, a tender father, and a confiding friend, that pained him and made him blind to all else.

Old Dan Rice was sent for, and dropped the tear of friendship upon the grave of his old comrade, his grief being most touching.

"I remember well the night him and me picked you up, Neil," said the old clown, now retired from the profession. "I tell yer, he had a kind heart, George had; and though I laughed at him for taking care of a poor babby, I couldn't blame him after, when I see you grow up, and I often wished I'd been as kind-hearted myself."

It was just like the man, to deprecate his own well-known qualities, and Neil smiled sadly, and wiped away his tears.

"They tell me you've got a rich father somewhere," continued Dan Rice, "what wants to take you and make a gentleman of you. He can't improve on you, my boy. You're as fine a gentleman as I want to see, in a day's travelin'."

"If you do go to him, and I suppose you won't care to keep in 'the business now that George has left it, God bless him, don't you give up them two names, Rice and Adams, whatever else you may stick on to 'em."

"Indeed I will not," said Neil, energetically; "and the Rice and Adams shall go on the end."

"That's right; stick to Rice, it's nourishing," said the old man, making a joke in spite of himself. "And as long as I live I'll remember you and the night when we took care of ye, George and me, but particularly George. I know ye won't forget old Dan Rice, the man that has made more folks laugh than any other fellow this side of Heaven."

You may be sure that Neil did not forget him, but our story has to be told, and so we must hurry along.

The next day after the funeral Neil was performing again, for professionals have to keep up their engagements without regard to family bereavements, and many a heart-broken fellow has had to laugh and crack his jokes to the heedless crowd while the sod was still freshly laid over some loved one.

Neil concluded that he had better fill out the season and then decide whether to go on or not, so drying his eyes, he went through his performance the same as ever, and earned the plaudits of thousands.

The lions seemed to miss the jolly clown, for he had been a great favorite with them, and for a long time they used to watch for his

regular coming with dainties such as they liked, but finally the remembrance seemed to fade away and they thought only of Neil.

Nate Wentworth had returned to Indianapolis by this time and the house was opened again, the old gentleman having also returned, and he and his son sustained the same agreeable relations as before, Wentworth having no idea that the boy he had taken in was an impostor, and finding much happiness in his presence.

Indeed, it may be said to his credit, that Nate devoted himself unselfishly to his father, and did all in his power to make him happy.

He was unremitting in his attentions, and no son could have done more than he did to gain the old man's affection, doing it all quietly and unostentatiously, withal, and letting no opportunity pass for increasing his comfort.

Wentworth was perfectly wrapped up in the lad, and grew fonder of him day by day, especially as he now began to show signs of weakness and approaching dissolution.

It might have been a month after Nate's first meeting with Robbins when he came across him once more upon the street quite suddenly.

The man scowled savagely at him, and as Nate passed on without noticing him in the slightest degree, hissed:

"You've got to the end of your rope, young man, so look out for squalls. I am going to expose you to-morrow."

Nate said nothing, but glancing across the street saw a dark, gipsy-looking man leaning against a lamp-post, gazing intently at him.

He made a few rapid signs to this man, turning his head quickly toward Robbins, and then passed on, swinging his stick lightly as if nothing had happened and nodding pleasantly to several acquaintances.

The man opposite was Dan Gregory, and the signs meant harm to Robbins, and speedily.

Dan had given his oath to protect Nate from all his enemies, and now he had received orders that he was to put this man out of harm's way at once.

He glanced sharply at the rogue, and followed him at a distance like a sleuth-hound, never letting him out of his sight.

It was night, and Robbins was walking through a dark, deserted part of the city, talking unwittingly to himself.

"She will do her part," he muttered, "and we'll expose this young fellow. Then to have another try at the lion tamer, get him out of the way, and the money is ours. Ha! he's a smarter fellow to handle than young Adams. Who would suppose he'd go back on me like that. Ha, I don't like his dark eyes and skin. He's got Hindoo blood in him, and those fellows are not to be trusted."

Is that a shadow that creeps after him so stealthily, following his every movement, pausing when he pauses, moving when he moves, turning as he turns?

Ay, it is a shadow, and a vengeful one, and one, too, that will never leave him while he lives.

He reaches the head of a dark alley, where not the faintest glimmer of light can be seen, and pauses for a moment to look about him.

At that instant his shadow darts forward as noiselessly as a real shadow, a hand falls, there is a quivering pain all through the villain's frame, and he falls into the dark alley with a long knife sticking in his back up to the hilt!

Then, and only then, the shadow leaves him and glides away like a guilty thing, while from a neighboring street comes the signal of the patrol, denoting:

"All's well!"

So it is, for the cause of fraud and deception, but for the villain and conspirator, struck down unseen and unwarmed, that message is a hot

Next day comes the news of a mysterious murder, and the city is wild with excitement, no clew being found to the assassin.

Nate Wentworth, in his elegant apartments, surrounded by every luxury that taste and wealth can furnish, smiles bitterly as he reads the news, and murmurs:

"It was a necessity! Better his life than my father's! The *Practitioners of the Night* can do quick work when it is required of them."

Neil reads the account a day or so later, and says:

"Well, he won't trouble me any more, that is certain," little knowing that the man's death is but another of the difficulties in the way of his getting a fortune.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH CONSCIENCE—AN APPEAL.

One day early in November, Nate Wentworth was taking his usual afternoon promenade, faultlessly attired, as he always was, and looking the very picture of the elegant young gentleman, when he suddenly came face to face with a woman.

She was neither young nor good-looking, and was poorly, even shabbily, dressed. Yet she claimed his instant attention.

She looked him full in the face with her cold gray eye, meeting his deep, melting brown ones, and he quailed before her glance.

It was the companion of the woman whose dying confession he had heard and taken a base advantage of.

He knew too well what she would say before she had even opened her lips, and he felt as guilty as Cain.

"You have broken your oath to a dying woman!" she said.

That was all; but had she spoken for half an hour she could not have made her accusation more forcible.

Nate bowed his head, while his fine-featured, olive face turned a ghastly white.

Conscience-smitten, his guilt brought directly home to him with such startling abruptness he could but confess it without reserve or attempt at palliation.

"I know it," he answered, simply.

"You have perjured yourself," she continued, "and for what?"

Nate answered her never a word.

"For wealth and position, for a home and affection," she said, replying to her own question.

Nate said nothing, but stood like a statue, carved from granite, so rigid were his muscles.

"Perhaps you are to be pitied," said the woman, relaxing somewhat the sternness of her tones. "He had all these—you had none; you have not robbed him of any of these, and you seem to be doing your best to please."

"I intend to make restitution," said Nate, quietly, "and have begun the work already."

Not more than a day or two previous he had expressed a package containing fifteen hundred dollars to Neil, having obtained his address.

He denied himself many things to do this, although Wentworth was constantly pressing money upon him.

Neil, guessing that this, as well as the previous sums he had received, came from the young impostor, put it aside untouched.

It was strange and yet perfectly natural that Nate should not attempt to defy or browbeat this woman, but confess his entire guilt, not abjectly, but with a quiet dignity that was all the more pitiful.

"I believe you," she said, her tones softening; "but," and they grew stern again, "that is not enough."

"What more would you have?"

"Your confession that you have proved false to your solemn oath; that you have stolen your way into a heart that you might have entered honestly."

"To whom would you have me make this confession?"

"To him."

"The one I have defrauded!"

"No, he knows all."

"You have told him?"

"Yes."

"He has taken no steps against me, and I have seen him since you have."

"Nor will he. His nature is too forgiving. He will never speak one word against you."

"You would have me tell all this to my father?"

"Yes."

"I cannot."

"You must."

"No!"

This was the first forcible word Nate had used, and it was uttered in a voice that left no room for doubt that he would do as he said.

"Then I will tell him myself."

"To what end?"

"That right may be done, be the consequences good or bad."

The woman was inexorable, that was plain to be seen, and acted only from her own sense of justice, having nothing to gain, personally, by her course.

"Do you know what you would do if you told him everything?" asked Nate, excitedly.

"Show him that he has been basely deceived."

"That is not all."

"What more?"

"Suppose you show him I am an impostor?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you prove to him that I stole my way into his heart, made myself necessary to his existence, betrayed a trust, and cheered his declining days by my ten learest affection?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you do all this?"

"Well?"

"Suppose he believes every word you utter?"

"I do will."

"Can you foresee the result?"

"What do you think?"

"I do not think, I know. Do all this, and you will kill him."

"Kill him?" murmured the woman beneath her breath.

"Yes, you will strike at his heart strings and tear them asunder. You will destroy the idol that his fond fancy has set up. You will convince him that the human heart is a mass of wickedness, and that love, affection, gratitude, are all shams!"

He paused, not for the sake of seeing what effect this would have, for he was not looking at the woman at all, but from sheer lack of breath, his words having been uttered quickly and impulsively, and without the slightest pause.

"You will take away his belief in mankind," resumed Nate, continuing his argument, though there was now but little more to add.

"You will destroy his vision of happiness; you will break his heart!"

The woman shuddered.

"At his time of life, that means death! You will bring on an apoplectic fit, from which I can apprehend but one result."

"The right must be done," said the woman.

"I am not pleading for myself," said Nate, "but for him. He cannot live many years longer at best, and I would have those years calm and tranquil. Do as you propose, and he will die, a poor, grief-stricken, broken-hearted old man."

"And yet I will have done my duty," said the woman.

"Duty!" hissed Nate. "You mistake the word. You mean fanaticism!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BRETHREN OF THE NIGHT—DANGEROUS GROUND.

"Do you doubt my sincerity?" said the woman.

"No—I only question the advisability of the move. Don't fancy for an instant that I fear an exposure on my own account. For myself I care nothing. When my father dies I drop the name of Wentworth and return to the world, unknown, unaided, to make my way to an honest living."

"Do you think you can be honest after this? No! I shall tell him all, and can then rest contented with the satisfaction of having done right."

"Enough," said Nate, proudly. "I have done with you. Do as you please in this matter. I have nothing further to say. Good-afternoon!"

He walked away with such a proud and dignified air that the woman was utterly dumfounded; it was so different from his humble manner a few minutes before.

As Nate was dressing for dinner that evening he murmured, scarcely above his breath:

"Will it be advisable to put the Brother of the Night upon this mad creature's track?"

The Brethren of the Night! Again comes that mysterious allusion. What can it mean?

As an explanation is necessary to show whence came the power which Nate had over Dan, it will be necessary to go back a few years in the young man's life.

He had himself said that no one knew him in these parts, and that consequently he was safe in pretending to be someone else.

Nate's mother was Spanish, whence came his olive complexion and dreamy eyes, and his father was an American, from whom he got his determination and polished manners.

He was born in Australia, and it was there he had met Dan Gregory, the gypsy, between whom and himself there had been a close bond of union.

The lad's true name was Ralph Adriance, and his father's first name was Lawrence, consequently the name of Adrian Laurens was one that easily suggested itself.

His mother died in Australia, and his father, partly from grief and a care-naught sort of spirit, and a good deal from natural inclination, joined a party of bushrangers and malefactors called the Brethren of the Night, from the fact of their carrying on their nefarious practices always under cover of darkness.

Young Ralph was early initiated into their ways, and some three years previous to the date of our story, upon the death of his father, assumed the leadership of the band, young as he was.

He was in reality older than he looked, being twenty-one at the time he met Neil, but even at that age was an adept in criminal deeds.

His father had been shot in the commission of a crime, and the lad swore vengeance upon the murderers, as he called them, seeming to forget that his father richly deserved death, and had only received his merits.

The Brethren of the Night were sworn to defend and succor each other wherever they might be, no matter how far from their regular haunts they might roam, or how suddenly they might be called upon.

Any brother who proved recreant to his vows was doomed to death, and should he leave the country would be hunted down and assassinated by persons appointed to the task.

Though he might escape detection for years, the end was certain, and when he least expected it would be struck down in the dark, and no one be any the wiser.

There were numerous signs and passwords by which the brethren knew each other, and in which they could make known their wishes, so that if two of them met in a crowded place and one wanted something of the other, it was not necessary to say a word, but simply make signs.

The leader of the band had a right to ask three favors of any of his followers without requiring any of them, but beyond that he was expected to do a similar turn for any who demanded it.

When Ralph said to Dan "It is the third command," it was understood that if Dan did anything else for him outside of the regular business of the brotherhood, he would be expected to do him a like favor at any time he might be called upon.

The brethren themselves did favors for one another reciprocally, the chief being the only one who could claim certain service without requiring it, otherwise than giving his general protection to all.

The efforts of the military and police had been successful in driving many of the members out of the country, but the same ties still bound them, and no matter where they might meet, they were under obligations to relieve and protect each other.

Ralph had been in America barely a year previous to his meeting Neil, and during that time he had devoted himself to acquiring the art of a trapezist, hoping thereby to make a living.

He was naturally agile and had no difficulty in making himself a first class gymnast, and the only reason he did not have a good position was that he never applied for one.

He was, in fact, what he had said he was, an amateur, although Adams believed him to be a professional, and he was thinking of applying for a position with Hooker & Ketchum when he met Robbins.

He knew of the man, having seen him in Australia, where he bore an unenviable reputation, and he soon learned that Robbins had some scheme on hand for which he needed assistance.

Robbins did not recollect having seen the young man before, although Adams professed to know him, but he soon discovered that here

was just the person he was looking for, having at that time conceived the idea of trumping up a false claimant.

Ad played his cards carefully, and Robbins had no idea of his real cleverness, expecting that he could twist him about his finger.

But for the fact of Ad's conceiving a strong liking for Neil, and his better nature being stirred within him, he would have done anything that Robbins required at his hands; but, as we have seen, he was half ashamed of his bargain, and, while intending to profit by Neil's indifference, scorned to act further with the schemer.

The meeting with Dan, who had fled on account of having murdered Edna's father, was totally unexpected on the part of both men; but the gypsy was bound to obey the commands of his chief, and so saw at once an opportunity for doing good and evil also, if necessary, at one and the same time.

He had asked one more favor of Dan than his privilege allowed, and now he was tormented lest the man should require his assistance and hold him to the oath.

Robbins had been disposed of through his instrumentality, and now this troublesome woman, with her stern sense of duty, promised to cause him still further annoyance.

He dared not call upon Dan again, and yet he felt himself standing upon the verge of a precipice, whence he might at any moment be dashed and meet his ruin.

Thus does one crime lead to another; but the blight of gold was upon him, and, despite his good intentions, there was no telling how far he might be led in his effort to maintain the position he had usurped.

"I will wait," he said quietly, as he prepared to go below; "I think I can beat this woman by my own weapons. If not, then I must call upon the Brotherhood, for I will not stain my own hands with blood when others can be hired to do the job instead."

CHAPTER XXX.

"A LIE HAS BEEN JUSTIFIED!"

It was after dinner and Nate sat reading to the old gentleman, when the footman announced that a poor woman wished to see Mr. Wentworth.

Nate colored, though his father did not observe it, and the latter asked what the woman wanted.

"She said she had an important revelation to make, sir; that is all, and said that she must see you."

"Pon my word! never saw anything like it—everybody wanting to make revelations. Aha, Nate, my boy, aren't you sorry you ever found your foolish old father—ahem, I'll vow he isn't; what do I want to ask him that for—guess I took too much claret for dinner, ahem! what do you say, my boy, shall we listen to this new revelation? Confound 'em all—enough to drive a fellow crazy—must be mad to think they can shake my faith, h'm! guess not! Well, my boy, what d'ye say, shall we listen or not?"

"I had rather not decide, sir," answered Nate, quietly. "I am not a disinterested person. We might as well hear the woman; perhaps her story has nothing to do with me."

"May be so, may be, though I fancy they are all jealous of you, and want to prejudice me against you. Plaguey lot of cormorants, that's what they are, confound 'em! H'm, I'm forgetting; show the person in," the latter remark being addressed to the footman.

The flunkey admitted the woman and then retired, the visitor taking a seat at the young gentleman's own request.

She was more neatly dressed than in the afternoon, and looked quite like a lady in reduced circumstances.

"Please state your errand as briefly as you can, madam," the old gentleman said, icily, "as my son and myself are engaged. It was only his condescension that gained you an admittance! H'm, guess that'll settle her," under his breath.

"My business is with you alone," she answered, darting a look of stern determination at Nate.

"Sorry to refuse you, madam, but my son and I have no secrets from each other. H'm, guess she don't fancy that much," in another aside.

"He has concealed the one great secret of his life from you," answered the other, who seemed to feel that her task was harder than she had imagined, "and it is that which I have come to disclose."

"H'm, knew it was that; swore it was nothing else. Go ahead, my dear woman, since you are here—wish I hadn't let her in, it's all the fault of that boy's kind heart—go ahead, but for Heaven's sake be brief, for I've heard this story before."

"To be brief, then, that young person has betrayed his trust, broken his oath, and is—"

"An impostor! H'm, I knew it! Bless my soul, if I believed everybody, I'd have been dead long ago. You see I am perfectly aware of what you want to say, so do hurry and get through with it."

"Be patient and hear me out," said the woman, and then she proceeded to tell her story, which we need not repeat, as it is perfectly familiar to our readers.

Wentworth was very impatient, and squirmed around most uneasily while the woman was accusing his beloved son of such arrant baseness, and more than once he appealed to Nate to give the woman the lie, and let him ring for the footman to show her out.

"Let her finish, sir," said Nate, quietly, though his breast was racked with the agonies of remorse and indignation combined. "I think we can settle the matter in a word. I can trust in your love to protect me from the attacks of a fanatical woman."

"Do you mean that?" said the old man, excitedly. "Do you think I am an old fool to believe all this rot you have been telling me? Get

to the end of your yarn, so that I can order the servant to show you out. Bless me! it'll give me more pleasure than anything I ever did in my life."

The woman completed her tale, showing up Nate's conduct in all its baseness, and then paused to note the effect.

The poor old man's faith was terribly shaken, and it would have taken but little to have brought on a dangerous illness from which there might be no recovering.

"Tell me, my boy," he said, terribly agitated—"tell me, in one word, is this woman's story true or false? My God, forgive me for doubting you, but it sounds more like truth than I dare admit. I will believe you, my lad—the only thing I have left to love me and to be loved. Speak the word, and if you are really what she says you are, then Heaven help me!"

He leaned his face upon his hands, and sobbed in a way that would have touched a heart of stone, his frame seeming convulsed with the agony he suffered.

"Father, dear!" said Nate, kneeling at his side, "forgive me for submitting you to all this; it was not needed to shake your faith in me, and I would have spared you had I known the bitter cruelty this woman was capable of."

"Answer her in one word, Nate," said the old gentleman.

Nate thereupon rose to his feet, drew himself up proudly, and said slowly, and with the most bitter scorn:

"Then let me tell you, madam, so that my father can hear every word, that your story is one long tissue of lies, and that there is not the least grain of truth in it. I am my father's only and lawful son, and need no proof to support my statement."

"Thank God!" said the old man. "Tell her to go, Nate."

Nate himself opened the door and led the way to the vestibule, where he swung open the great oaken doors and pointed to the street.

"Gol!" he said, "and never dare trouble us again. You have done all that your conscience can require," this he said with a bitter sneer, "and you ought to be satisfied that you have not killed him. You can thank me, if you have any pity, for having saved his life!"

"You have triumphed," said the woman, "and a lie has been justified. Do not think, however, that you will go unpunished. You swore, as you hoped for Heaven, to obey my friend's dying request, and now you have doubly perjured—"

Nate again pointed to the street, and the woman went out, the heavy portals closing behind her with a bang.

"A lie has been justified," repeated Nate. "Yes, if ever a falsehood deserved pardon, this one does. Does she think I could see the man I love better than all beside sacrificed to her ridiculous sense of justice! Never! Some people would take a scrubbing brush to the sun to clean the spots."

The old gentleman, reassured by Nate's firm reply, received him with more than usual affection, and was strengthened by the lad's devotion.

This was the one bright spot in the young man's conduct, which saved him from utter baseness, and no one could have shown greater tenderness and deeper affection towards anyone than he did to his adopted parent.

"I have saved him!" he muttered, as he lay on his bed that night; "and I will sacrifice the man that dares molest him. I am nothing, but he is dearer to me than life, and I will kill anyone who does ought to lessen his happiness. He must have a change of air, though, and I think I had better take him to Europe."

He knew not that the fatal blow had been struck unknown to him, and that all his care and devotion would avail nothing to save his father from the blight of knowing that the one being he had loved most was a trickster.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEIL LOSES ANOTHER FRIEND.

THE season was drawing to an end, as the cold weather was fast approaching, and Neil would soon have an opportunity of resting.

A proposal had been made to him by an enterprising manager to take the lions upon a tour through the South during the winter, and then meet the main organization again when it should start out in the spring.

Neil did not favor this proposition, as he felt he needed a rest, having been performing unremittingly, with the exception of the time occupied in coming across the ocean, for more than two years.

Messrs. Hooker & Ketchum, being the owners of the lions, did not care to risk the loss of such a valuable property, and decided to give the brutes a rest, as they needed it as much as the performers.

"They won't be any good except for menageric purposes," said Hooker, "if we don't have Neil, for you won't find anyone else that will make as much out of 'em as he did, supposing he leaves the business."

"Then we'll have to sell 'em separately," answered Ketchum, "for they'll eat us out of house and home unless they are made one of the big cards."

The show was billed to end up the season in New York, and great preparations were made for that event, everybody being resolved to do their utmost to please.

There was but one more town to be made before going into New York, and here an incident happened which saddened Neil more than he could have thought possible.

The man who usually fed the lions was taken suddenly ill a few days before this, and a new hand was put in his place.

This man was wantonly cruel by nature, and he delighted in tormenting the animals and seeing them go into a rage.

He tried this upon Castor several times, and at last the angry

brute, with a swift motion, reached out his paw when the man was passing and struck him an ugly blow on the shoulder which laid it open to the bone.

The fellow, instead of blaming himself for the accident, became enraged at the brute, and determined to have revenge upon him.

The next day after the attack, having had his wound dressed, he put poison in the middle of a joint of meat intended for Castor, with the intention of killing him.

He was not able to attend to his duties, but gave instructions to another man, and he unwittingly gave the noble animal a dose which should kill him.

He was taken sick, and despite all the attention given him, died an hour or so after the evening performance.

He had previously been removed to another cage, and had not performed as usual in the afternoon, being not only sick, but fretful and savage besides.

Neil was very much puzzled to account for the sudden disaster, and called in an eminent physician from New York, the local doctor having stated his suspicions that foul play had been practiced.

The stomach of the dead lion was opened, and its contents analyzed, the presence of a deadly poison being at once detected.

The man who had fed the lions was questioned, but he knew nothing about the affair, other than that the wounded man had given him the meat and told him to what animal to give it.

The villain had fled by this time, and suspicion was at once directed towards him, and detectives put upon his track.

They did not catch him, but, for all that, Nemesis was upon his track, and he was punished more severely than would otherwise have been the case.

In his hurry and excitement he had caused his wound to open, caught a severe cold in it, and brought on acute inflammation.

The wound grew worse, mortified, and before twenty-four hours after his flight he was dead.

The case was reported, and only by this means was the villain discovered and the circus people made aware of his sudden punishment by a retributive justice.

Neil felt that he had lost a kind friend, and his grief was only second to that caused by the loss of his foster-father.

He seemed weighed down by the loss, and imagined that this was but the first of a series of misfortunes which would fall upon him.

Castor being the property of Hooker & Ketchum, Neil was no loser by his death, but he would sooner have paid the value of the intelligent animal twice over than have had him taken away in such a manner.

The only thing which could at all compensate him for the loss was the presentation of the skin, stuffed and mounted in the most scientific manner, the circus proprietor begging him to accept it as a reminder of the poor beast and as a token of their own esteem.

The skin was mounted in a very striking position, and the animal seemed just preparing for a leap, the attitude being so perfect that at the museum, where it was subsequently placed until Neil could take it elsewhere, people would often start back in surprise when coming suddenly upon it.

The show opened in New York at last, but poor Neil had lost his only real friend, and he was in no mood to perform as he had done.

He could not show the same spirit and dash as before, and the other lions, seeming to miss their comrade, were harder to manage, and not nearly as tractable as they had been.

Neil never put his head into their mouths now, and he was constantly on the watch for some exhibition of native ferocity which he knew would be sure to show itself sooner or later, despite the careful training he had given the beasts.

On the third night, Nero, the largest of the three, becoming excited by the noise, or feeling that Neil's power was not so great as before, attacked the young performer and came near to ending his career as a lion tamer then and there.

Neil slashed the animal over the face with his whip again and again, and fairly made him retreat to his cage, although suffering keenly from a serious wound the brute had inflicted.

The others were put into separate cages, and Neil's performance came to a sudden termination.

His hurt was worse than had been thought at first, and for the remainder of the stay in New York he was unable to appear, thus causing great disappointment, and materially reducing the receipts.

As if this was not enough, the city bank, where he had deposited his earnings, and also the sums sent him by Nate, and where Edna also had placed her money by his advice, was broken into by burglars a night or two before the close of the season, and his property, among other valuables, was stolen.

His friends dead, his money gone, in great physical pain, and cheated out of his inheritance, the poor boy's case looked utterly hopeless, and the night of adversity seemed to have closed in upon him most gloomily.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST BLOW FALLS UPON AN INNOCENT HEAD.

NATE WENTWORTH acted at once upon his determination to take his father to Europe, and in less than a week from the time the woman had paid her well-nigh fatal visit the two were upon their way across the ocean.

The houses in city and country which Wentworth had kept up were closed, the servants discharged, all the valuable plate, furniture and pictures stored, and the horses sold, the intention being to remain in Europe for an indefinite length of time.

Nate was to finish his education, and to have the best foreign tutors that money could obtain, while his father was to travel, and take life as easy as possible.

Of course, Nate would go with him, for without him the object of the trip, his restoration to health, would not be gained, as the lad's presence and attention was necessary to his very existence.

They arrived upon the other side after a quick and uneventful passage, and went at once into the most secluded parts of England, taking Nate's tutors with them.

The old man improved rapidly, and really enjoyed the change, the absence from a place where he would be likely to think of unpleasant things, seeming to be as beneficial as anything.

England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain were visited in turn, Nate receiving no end of that culture and polish which only the mixing with people of refinement and travel can give to the man who is willing to learn from every source.

The greater part of a year was spent in this way, and the old gentleman seemed never to have been happier or more contented, his health, too, appearing to be excellent.

The end was near, however, and the blow, long threatened and most carefully aimed, was about to fall.

It was just a year from the day that Nate had come to him, and Wentworth made it the occasion of a special rejoicing.

He gave a dinner to a large number of friends and acquaintances he had made in Paris, where he was at the time, and Nate was the lion of the hour.

The festivities were prolonged until quite late, but at last all the guests had departed and the two were left alone.

"Nate, my boy," said the old gentleman, "you remember the little ebony casket in which I keep my papers, the important ones, I mean?"

"Yes, sir, I remember it well. Do you want it?"

"Yes; it is in the safe."

The last time Nate had seen this casket opened was upon the night of the woman's visit, and, although he did not know it, it had never been unlocked since that time.

The old gentleman had placed it on the table, at the time mentioned, and after the woman's departure had closed and fastened it, never having opened it since.

He was preparing a nice little surprise for Nate this evening in Paris, the same being the reading of his will, made shortly after Nate's coming.

The chief clause of this document, duly signed and attested, was as follows:

"To my son, Nathaniel Wentworth, I leave the whole of my fortune, personal property and real estate, without conditions, to have and to hold, and to his heirs and assigns forever."

Nate procured the cabinet, and the old gentleman opened it, and began taking out the papers it contained.

At that moment an interruption came in the form of the butler, who desired to state that one of the guests had found a jewel from a ring, lost by someone, and had come to return it; being obliged to leave the city at such an early hour in the morning, he had not waited until the next day.

Nate ran down to see to the matter, and recognized the jewel as belonging to himself.

Thanking the gentleman for his kindness, Nate returned to his father's apartments, not having been absent more than five minutes.

When he entered, he saw his father with his head resting upon the desk before which he had been sitting, while the ebony casket lay open just by it.

One hand was spread out upon the writing table, while the other hung limp and motionless by his side.

Something about the position startled Nate, and sent a deathly pallor to his cheek, his mind being troubled with a horrible misgiving.

It was not likely that Mr. Wentworth had fallen asleep in so short a time, and, besides that, the position was not natural enough for a sleeping person.

With a startled cry upon his lips, Nate sprang forward, and, seizing his father by the hand, raised his head and gazed into his face.

The hand was icy cold, the face pale and haggard, an expression of deep pain stamped upon the features.

Nate pressed his hand to the heart, but it gave back no answering sign. The poor old man was dead.

It took but an instant to tell the cause of his death, for spread before him on the desk was a paper which needed but one glance to send the hot blood rushing to Nate's cheek.

It was a copy of the original document sworn to by the woman who had stolen Neil, and retained by her after giving Nate the other.

A comparison between it and the first, which was also upon the desk, both having been in the casket, proved conclusively the deception that had been practiced upon the confiding old gentleman.

How had this document found its way to the money casket?

The woman had put it there when Nate was kneeling by his father's side, and the old gentleman, closing the box after her departure, had locked it in with the other contents, where it had laid until now.

It was the first thing that had struck his eye when he opened the casket, and by a strange coincidence, the false statements lay directly under it.

With a horrible suspicion tormenting his mind, the old gentleman had compared the two, and the whole plot was laid bare before him.

This was the blow which the woman had prepared, and now it had fallen with overwhelming force.

With a cry that welled up from the very bottom of his heart, the poor old man gave one gasp as he realized how he had lavished his affection upon an impostor, and being so honest and upright himself, the knowledge of all this stabbed him to the heart.

"God forgive him!" he muttered, "for I loved him better than my own life!"

Then he fell forward with a sigh that tore his very heart strings, and in an instant he had passed away from this world to the better land beyond.

Nate realized the truth, and folding up the papers, sobbed as if his heart would break.

"Now she will be satisfied," he said at length in a terribly calm voice, "and at what a cost! Could she not have spared him this infliction! The world is pitiless, and the most unsparing of all are those who think they are doing their strict duty!"

The will was found among the other papers, and Nate read it through carefully, saying with a smile, as he replaced everything in the casket and closed it once more:

"There is nothing now that can prevent the rightful heir from receiving his just dues."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JUSTICE AT LAST—REPENTANCE—CONCLUSION.

THE summer came after a tiresome winter, and Neil Adams, arising from a bed of sickness, began to make his plans for the future.

He was penniless, and without the means of making his way in the world, his health being still too poor to admit of his returning to the ring.

The lions had been sold to various parties, and the circus was far away, having begun its annual tour.

His friends had left funds to defray his expenses, but these were now gone, and he would not apply for more, though it would have been an easy matter to discover the whereabouts of Hooker, for Ketchum had retired from the business and gone back to England, where he had left his family.

Edna had been faithful to Neil, and, declining all offers of engagements, had remained by his side all through his illness, and tended him with a devotion worthy of a Cordelia, never complaining, and always ready to cheer him by a merry laugh or an amusing story, cheerfulness being the best tonic in the world.

She had indeed proved her identity by the papers recovered from the gypsy, but the fortune she was supposed to inherit had consisted of a few hundred dollars only, the rest have been squandered in lawsuits, the relatives having amused themselves by fighting for the fortune during her long absence.

She had some little money left from her earnings, but this was now spent, and half her inheritance besides, unknown to Neil, the generous girl being too unselfish to deprive him of any needed comforts.

When he at last arose from his bed of sickness he made her tell him everything, and could not reprove her for her devotion and forgetfulness of self.

He shrank from taking any more of her little store, now that he was comparatively well, and begged her to let him repay her, but to this she would never consent.

"We must look about us," he said, "and I may be able to get you an engagement. As for me, I will trust to Providence, and maybe I will recover my fortune. They say that the burglars are being followed up, with every certainty of capture."

A day or so after this, as he was taking a stroll for the sake of a breath of air, he came suddenly upon Crowell.

"By Jove! you're just the man I wanted to see!" said the latter. "The thieves have been captured and nearly all their plunder recovered. Your money and Edna's was found in a package by themselves, perfectly intact! Where have you been all this time—I have advertised for you a week?"

"I have seen none of the newspapers; my finances did not allow of such luxuries," said Neil, quietly, uttering volumes in those few words.

"Come with me this very minute," said Crowell, and before Neil could resist, he had hurried him into a carriage and was driving at a rapid pace to the headquarters of the chief of police.

In an hour thereafter Neil's money and Edna's also was handed over to him, and from being a poor, friendless lad, he suddenly found himself possessed of a small fortune.

The sudden change from poverty to riches was too much for him in his present weak state, and he fell in a dead swoon.

Crowell took him to a hotel, and then went for Edna; and the evening that followed was one long to be remembered.

Blessings, like misfortunes, never come singly, and a still further surprise was in store for our hero.

The account of the recovery of his fortune was published in all the papers, and the next day a gentleman of the legal persuasion called upon him to satisfy himself that he was really Neil Adams, the former lion tamer.

Being convinced of this, he placed a packet in his hands and bade him open it.

"It was left with us," he said, "by a dark-complexioned, very elegant gentleman, who besought us to use every effort to find and give it to you."

"Did he give his name?"

"Yes, but made us promise not to reveal it. We have advertised for you, but with no success, for a month past. Seeing in the papers this morning that you were here, I hastened to deliver the packet into your own hands."

The packet being opened, was found to contain an ebony box and a sealed letter addressed to Neil, in which was the key of the box.

The letter was very brief, reading as follows:

"The inclosed box and its contents belong to you. I have restored everything, and your claim can be easily proven. Forgive me for my baseness, and forget that I have ever lived to repay your kindness with ingratitude."

The casket contained the will, the two sworn documents, deeds of the houses owned by Wentworth, bank books and certificates of deposit representing half a million, and several thousand dollars in cash, besides a brief statement concerning Wentworth's death, and certificates from the Paris coroner and the governors of the cemetery of Pere la Chaise, showing the cause of death and the fact of the deceased having been buried in the above place.

Thus had the real Nathaniel Wentworth at last received his inheritance, and the gaunt figure of poverty fled away into the darkness, never again to show its face.

"But for that falsehood," said Neil, as we shall still call him, "I might have been saved a world of annoyance and suffering. That was my first lie, and, God helping me, it shall be the last."

A month or so after this, Neil, having proved his claim and come into his property, was walking along the river front one night, unobserved, when he saw a young man standing in the shadow of a tree.

"This will end my slavery," he was saying, "and absolve me from all obligations to that man."

He was in the very act of raising something to his lips, when Neil, apprehending that he was about to take poison, rushed forward and dashed aside his hand, causing a little ornamental vial to fall to the ground, where it was shattered to fragments.

"Stay! What would you do?" he cried.

The young man muttered a low cry of recognition, and pronounced Neil's former name.

Our hero drew him into the light, and gazed into his face with an exclamation of astonishment.

He had saved from death the person who had wronged him, Ralph Adriance, or Adrian Laurens, as he had known him.

"You have saved my life, Neil," said the young man, with the old well-remembered tenderness in his voice. "That vial contained prussic acid, one whiff of which would have made me forget everything."

"Why did you wish to do so?"

"Because I am haunted!"

It appeared that Ralph had met Dan again, and the latter had demanded his assistance in a job that he had on hand.

He refused, and Dan had threatened his life. Ralph, well knowing that the man would do as he had said, fled to New York, but he had seen Dan again that very night, and knew that he was doomed.

He had, therefore, determined to put an end to his existence, having been provided with the means for many months, and but for Neil's timely interference, would have succeeded in accomplishing his self-purpose.

"I have wronged you, and yet you have saved my life," he said. "Would you have done it had you known me?"

"Yes; the past is forgotten. I would have you live for repentance. By the love I once had for you, by the pity I still feel for you, I command you to live!"

"I cannot refuse, and I will obey. Farewell forever, for I must never know you again."

Then Neil heard a sudden sound of footsteps, and a man rushed upon him and bore him to the earth.

He had mistaken Neil for Ralph, and in an instant our hero's life would have been sacrificed.

Luckily one hand was free, and as the blow descended, his revolver belched forth a stream of fire, and the leaden messenger of death crashed through the murderer's brain.

In the police court Neil was exonerated, an unknown witness having sworn that he had acted in self-defense.

The unknown witness was Ralph, who, hearing the scuffle, had turned just in time to see the whole affair.

Neil never saw the young man after that night, at least not to be recognized by him; but some years later he saw in the street a man in somber garb, who was pointed out to him as one of the most untiring workers for the salvation of body and soul that the city could command, being connected with a well-known charitable institution, whose mission it was to save boys and young men from crime, the river, and State prison.

The man was dark and remarkably handsome, wearing a full beard, his eyes being full of tenderness, and as beautiful as a hour's, and Neil had no difficulty in recognizing his old companion, Adrian Laurens.

No sign of recognition came into the latter's face, however, and he passed by without making a sign, but Neil knew that he was known, and that the man had passed him thus that his vow of keeping his identity a strict secret might not be violated.

Many times in the years that followed, did Neil hear of the good deeds of this man, and thus had every needed evidence of his sincere repentance and strict obedience to the command given him upon that last night he had ever spoken to our hero.

Neil is now enjoying his wealth and the sweet society of Edna, his loving wife, and with a merry group of children about him, remembers only with feelings of pleasure, the days long gone by, when he was known as YOUNG GRIZZLY ADAMS, THE WILD BEAST TAMER.

[THE END.]

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